

*R. Simpson*  
LAE · FINSCHHAFEN · MARKHAM & RAMU VALLEYS · HUON  
PENINSULA · FINISTERRE RANGE · RAI COAST · BOGADJIM  
MADANG · ALEXISHAFEN · KARKAR Is. · HANSA BAY

# Reconquest



**NEW GUINEA**  
**1943 - 1944**

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY  
AT WAR

PRICE 1/-

**T**he Japanese met their masters in the battles for Lae, the Markham and Ramu Valleys and the Huon Peninsula, just as they had met them in the earlier campaigns of Milne Bay, the Owen Stanleys, Buna-Gona-Sanananda and Wau-Salamaua.

Out-planned and out-fought, the enemy met in these battles troops who were able, for the first time in New Guinea, to use all their weapons.

The successive battles were characterised by the effective co-ordination of all arms and all services, but of the many factors which contributed to our success outstanding were the courage, quality and training of our soldiers.

**General Sir Thomas Blamey,**

Commander-in-Chief,

The Australian Military Forces.

# RECONQUEST

AN OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY'S  
SUCCESSES IN THE OFFENSIVES AGAINST

**LAE - FINSCHHAFEN - MARKHAM  
and RAMU VALLEYS - HUON  
PENINSULA - FINISTERRE MOUN-  
TAINS - RAI COAST - BOGADJIM  
- MADANG - ALEXISHAFEN -  
KARKAR IS. - HANSA BAY**

*September, 1943—June, 1944*



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**GENERAL SIR THOMAS BLAMEY**

**G.B.E., K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., E.D.**

Commander-in-Chief

**AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES**



The Victoria Cross was awarded to two  
Australian infantrymen who fought in  
the Lae-Huon Peninsula campaigns.

**Near Lae—**

Private R. KELLIHER  
7th Australian Division

**At Sattelberg—**

Sergeant T. DERRICK, D.C.M.,  
9th Australian Division



**T**HE Japanese had suffered several major defeats in land operations in New Guinea before the Australian Army launched, on September 4, 1943, the greatest and most spectacular offensive action that had been undertaken to that time in the South-West Pacific Area.

At Milne Bay, in late August and early September, 1942, an invasion attempt was smashed, and two brigades of Australian troops inflicted on the Japanese his first reverse on land in this war.

In the Owen Stanley Ranges, in September of the same year, his attempt to drive down on Port Moresby was stopped, and the Australian counter-offensive forced him back into foxholes at Buna, Gona and Sanananda, on the north coast of the island, where his forces were destroyed by Australian and American troops.

He suffered another major defeat when he attempted to seize Wau, as a stepping stone to Port Moresby, in January, 1943, and was thrashed in a series of battles which culminated in the re-capture of Salamaua, in September, 1943.

Japanese dead had littered the beaches and the jungle ; the last chapter had been written in his campaign of conquest ; now he was completely on the defensive, and he was retiring rapidly.

He fought desperately in these later campaigns of 1943 and 1944. He was, as he had been at Buna, Gona and Sanananda, a dangerous, well-equipped, well-trained enemy. But he was not so keen about dying, preferring to attempt to escape when he knew that he was beaten. Even so, he gave little away, and in the re-conquest of these sections of New Guinea he suffered three times the casualties sustained by the attacking Australians.

## Retrospect.

Triumphs of the 1943-44 campaigns do not detract from the significance and high merit of the successes of 1942, for it was the annihilation of the Japanese troops at Buna, Gona and Sanananda—completed by January 22, 1943—that cleared the way for the reconquest of British New Guinea, for the attacks on New Britain, and for the ultimate campaigns by American troops along the northern coast of Dutch New Guinea.

Between January 22, 1943, and September 4, 1943, there was, however, considerable fighting and preparation for the combined operations of 7th and 9th Australian Divisions, which involved the co-ordinated employment of sea, land and air forces.

The strategical set-up subsequent to the elimination of the last of the Japanese at Sanananda was as follows:—

Frustrated in his attempts to reach Port Moresby through the Owen Stanleys, by way of Milne Bay and by sea, the enemy was about to strike at Wau. His attack on that vital air-strip was made on January 27, and had been completely defeated by February 3, when Australian troops launched a counter-attack, which was to be carried on with increasing momentum until Salamaua fell on September 11—a week after the attack against Lae had been undertaken.

A Japanese programme for a second attempt to capture Wau as a stepping place to Port Moresby was denied when the enemy's convoy was destroyed in the Bismarck Sea on March 2 and 3, 1943.

He was not given the opportunity to make his third planned attempt—in September and subsequently—for he was then fighting to save his own coastal bases.

Early in April, 1943, the Papuan Infantry Battalion, which had pursued along the coast such remnants as escaped from Sanananda, entered Morobe, and were followed by an American battalion combat team, which took possession of the town.

The remaining principal enemy strongholds then were Wewak, Madang, Finschhafen, Lae and Salamaua. The Japanese dominated the coast from Salamaua to the north-western tip of Dutch New Guinea, as well as the Markham and Ramu Valleys, and was fighting desperately in the mountainous hinterland of Salamaua.

On our side, successful completion of the Owen Stanleys—Buna-Gona-Sanananda campaigns had not only ensured the integrity of Port Moresby, but had given us new air and sea bases 400 miles closer to our next objectives; and these new bases made it possible for our aircraft to operate regardless of weather conditions over the Owen Stanleys.

There were now two obvious objectives—the capture of Lae, to provide an advanced base to which supplies could be transported by sea, and the subjection of the Markham Valley, where advanced air fields could be developed. So, in May, 1943, the Australian Army was assigned the task of taking Lae, Salamaua, Finschhafen and Madang areas.

Salamaua was not of great value in itself, but it was used as a blind to our real intentions, and the Japanese was trapped into pushing troops continually down from Lae into Salamaua and thence into the mountains, where they were killed off by the force which had driven forward from Wau, supplemented in the later months by an American force brought in through Nassau Bay. It was an essential part of the programme that Salamaua should not fall until the operation against Lae had begun.

In general, the major Australian operation of 1943 involved the capture of Lae and the Markham Valley with the latter's air fields and potential air fields, and exploitation around the coast to Finschhafen and thence to Madang.

### **Six Months' Planning.**

The campaign which was launched in September, 1943, was notable, among many respects, in that it afforded the Australian Army its first opportunity of long-range forward planning, and that those charged with the preparations worked in the knowledge that, also for the first time, reasonably adequate means were at their disposal.

Planning of the campaign began nearly six months before it was launched. The Commander-in-Chief established Planning Headquarters in Brisbane, and Major-General (now Lieut.-General) F. H. Berryman was placed in charge.

As the plan of operations was developed, 7th and 9th Divisions were re-equipped, reserves in personnel, stores and equipment established, and intensive training in jungle fighting undertaken in a healthy jungle area of North Queensland.

The highest degree of secrecy blanketed preparations. At planning headquarters, only those officers immediately concerned knew what was being done. A sand-table model of the area of the projected operations was built in a secret room, from which no written detail of the plan was taken until it became essential to take senior officers into the picture. Comparable secrecy protected the movement of the two divisions from the mainland to New Guinea.

On August 15, General Sir Thomas Blamey, with Major-General Berryman as his Chief of Staff, flew to New Guinea to take command of the operations and to complete plans. Lieut.-General Sir Edmund Herring then moved to a forward headquarters, where he could exercise command during active operations.

All planning had to be made on the basis that the Division (the 9th) which operated against Lae from the Huon Gulf, would have to be maintained by sea, while that which operated down the Lower Markham Valley (the 7th) would have to be sustained entirely by air, at any rate in the initial stages and until Lae was secured and supplies could be brought in through that port.

At this time intensive operations were in progress on the approaches to Salamaua, designed to draw Japanese reserves from Lae. The bulk of our troops in this area were supplied by air transport, the demands on which were heavy. Air transports were required to fly an American parachute regiment to Nadzab, and then to land and maintain the 7th Division. Consequently the maintenance of as many of our troops as possible in the Salamaua area had to be changed from air transport to water transport—and without making the change-over obvious to the enemy and without diminishing our pressure on Salamaua.

There was, in some quarters, an insistent desire to complete early the Wau-Salamaua campaign with the capture of Salamaua and its airstrip. Lae was, however, the greater prize, and while the enemy held Salamaua he could be deceived into believing that such of our preparations as he observed were directed against the minor objective, and not against Lae.

Had enemy reconnaissance aircraft discovered a big increase in amphibious craft and had Salamaua fallen, the Japanese would have expected an attack on Lae; but with the battle at Salamaua still raging, the enemy would conclude that we were reinforcing our forces at Salamaua. The surprise worked perfectly. Our landing east of Lae was unopposed. Enemy aircraft did not intervene until the beach-head was secured, and then not in any great strength.

The sequence of our attacks on Lae was most important. First, by using Salamaua as a cloak for our real intention, we gained a perfect surprise east of Lae and drew the enemy's attention there on September 4. On the following day the parachute troops were unopposed when they siezed Nadzab. They quickly made a landing strip for troops of 7th Division to commence landing on September 6, and it was not till September 10 that 7th Division, advancing on Lae, met the enemy in strength.

Another important decision had already been made. The Commander-in-Chief decided to launch the campaign as early as possible, and set a date over a week in advance of that which G.H.Q. had estimated to be the earliest by which we could be ready. By the redoubled efforts of all administrative and base troops and of the 7th and 9th Divisions, the attack on Lae commenced on September 4.

This forestalled an enemy attack in the Ramu Valley, and the speed with which Lae was captured enabled the 20th Australian Infantry Brigade to surprise and capture Finschhafen before an enemy division arrived in September-October to reinforce the garrison there.

When planning was undertaken, aerial transport was in short supply. The Australian command undertook, therefore, the seemingly impossible task of building a road into Wau from the

southern coast of New Guinea. This road was, in fact, completed, tremendous engineering difficulties having to be overcome; but the inflow of aerial transport made it unnecessary to place reliance upon land communications, so not only was the 7th Division transported by air in its initial movement, but supplies to it were maintained by the same means.

The initial planning was based on the assumption that it would be necessary to make provision for advanced fighter bases to protect both the aerial movement of the division and its subsequent supply from the air, as well as to provide fighter cover for bombers which were to attack Wewak and other enemy bases along the north coast.

The first advanced base selected for this purpose was at Tsili Tsili in the Watut Valley, which was to become, in September, a subsidiary base for the Australian movement against Nadzab and thence Lae. Another advanced emergency landing ground was selected at Garoke, on the Bena Bena plateau.

The 2/7th Independent Company, which had been operating round Wau, was withdrawn and flown into Bena Bena on May 27 to protect the air strip at Garoke. Until that time the sole protection of that area had been provided by a platoon of this Company, which had also been flown in about four months earlier. The 2/7th was reinforced later by the 2/2nd Independent Company, but supply difficulties precluded the further strengthening of the garrison.

These forward posts were subjected to air attack and were raided by small enemy parties, but the Japanese took no major offensive action against our positions at Bena Bena plateau before September, when their programme was forestalled by our operation against Lae.

### **New Port Developed.**

The decision to launch, co-incident with the airborne attack of the 7th Division, an amphibious assault on the Huon Gulf coast made necessary the establishment of a port between Milne Bay and "Red Beach," where the 9th Division actually landed on September 4. Buna was selected as this base and was developed so rapidly that the first overseas ship was able to begin discharging there on July 22.

Development of this port, so recently in the enemy's hands, was a vital factor in determining the date upon which the attack against Lae could be made. The work, however, was carried on with considerable speed and when the Lae operation began it was possible to maintain not only the 9th Division in its amphibious operation, but also the 7th Division. This was of the greatest importance, because flying conditions between the Buna area and Nadzab were infinitely better than those between Port Moresby and Nadzab, and the development on the north side made it possible to avoid the treacherous weather over the Owen Stanleys, which frequently makes air movement impracticable.

While this planning was being done, the campaign between Wau and Salamaua was being fought with ferocity. The enemy continued to move troops out of Lae through Salamaua and out into the mountains. As an outpost to Lae, Salamaua was of doubtful value to the enemy now that he had failed in his attempts to capture Wau, and he was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain his garrison, servicing of which was limited almost entirely to submarine and barge traffic along the coast. But he had been completely trapped, and he allowed Salamaua to become a continual drain upon his resources, accentuated by the transfer of troops from Lae for its defence.

Before the major operation was initiated on September 4, Fifth U.S. Air Force made determined attacks on Japanese bases right along the north coast, destroyed aircraft and established superiority to such extent that the Australian operations could be carried out with minimum loss of men and material. The Japanese air force did make attacks on the 9th Division shipping and caused damage and some casualties, but the loss in enemy planes was heavy.

All the operations were carried out without a hitch, in accordance with plan, and with complete success. As General Sir Thomas Blamey had directed, Salamaua did not fall until our Lae programme was being implemented, and within 12 days of the start of operations, both Lae and Salamaua were ours.

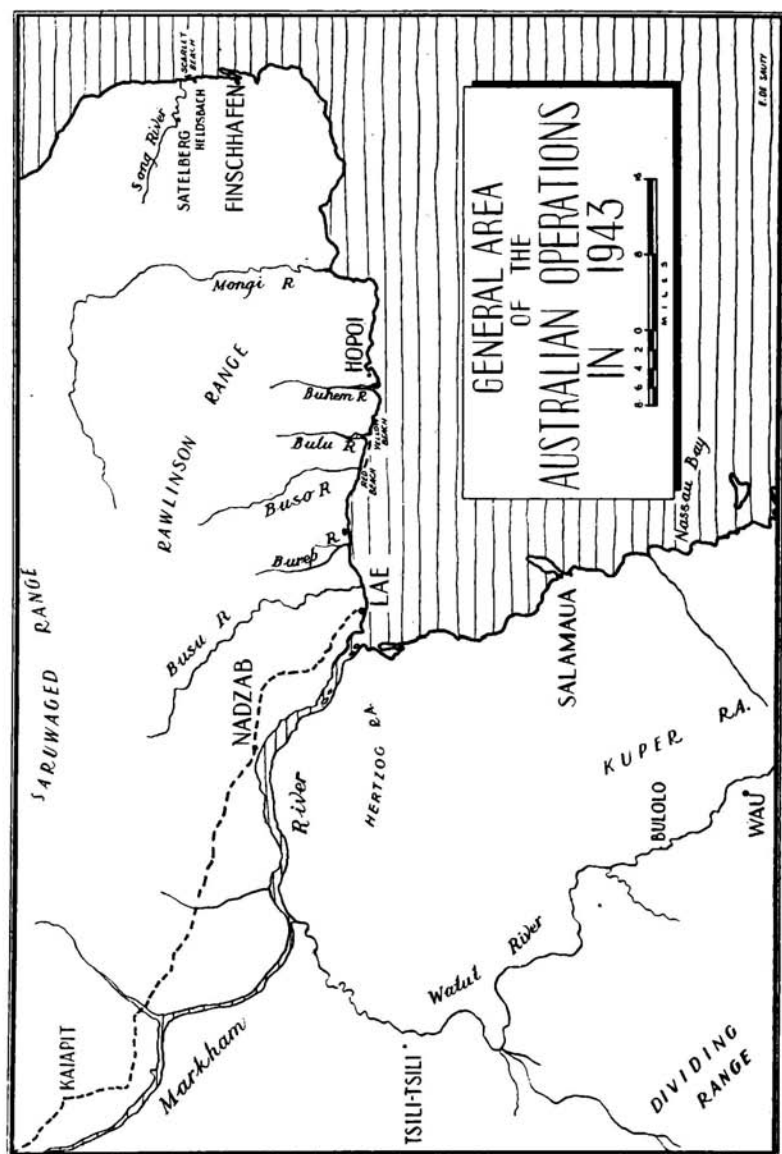
### **Second Sea Assault.**

The Australian programme contemplated an amphibious movement against Finschhafen after the capture of Lae, but this plan had to be kept in such flexible condition as to be capable of adjustment should it have been found that a stubborn battle preceded the fall of Lae.

On the other side, the 7th Division was to turn back from Lae and move up the Markham Valley and thence into the valley of the Ramu, where they could threaten the major base of Madang. This, it was expected, would influence the enemy in keeping at Madang sufficient forces to protect that base. Finschhafen, nevertheless, was of the greatest importance, because whoever occupied it could control Vitiaz Strait, between New Guinea and New Britain.

We had to have control of that water to permit the subsequent American operations against New Britain and later against the Admiralty group.

The 9th Division, therefore, immediately after the capture of Lae, and while it was still fit and supported by experience in assault landing, was commissioned to take Finschhafen. The operation was undertaken by a brigade group, although the exact enemy strength at Finschhafen was not known. There was slight opposition at the landing, which was made on the morning of



September 22, but bitter fighting took place before Finschhafen was captured on October 2.

In the 7th Division area, Australian troops were still dependent upon air supply, and would continue to be so dependent until an all-weather road could be built from Lae to Nadzab. The enemy, determined to deny us control of the two valleys, the Markham and the Ramu, was moving forces from Bogadjim to Kaiapit, but here, as elsewhere, he was anticipated by the aerial movement into that area of 2/6th Independent Company, the planes landing west of the Leron river on unprepared ground. These troops met only the enemy's advance guard.

Movement of the 7th Division was pressed with such speed that by early October, the Ramu Valley was ours as far as Dumpu, and air-fields were being rapidly developed. There was, however, to be some stiff fighting before the road to Bogadjim was cleared and subsequent possession of Madang, Alexishafen and Hansa Bay made possible.



# COMBINED OPERATION

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NADZAB  
HUON GULF  
LAE

*September 4th - 16th, 1943*

## **SPECIAL ORDER**

BY

**GENERAL SIR THOMAS BLAMEY,**

**G.B.E., K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.,**

**COMMANDER ALLIED LAND FORCES IN S.W. PACIFIC, AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.**

Headquarters,  
New Guinea Force,  
19 September '43

The capture of LAE is a signal step along the road to Victory.

It was due to the intensive bombing of the Air Force and its constant protection of the Navy and the Army from the enemy in the air—To the strong support of the Navy in transporting and protecting the land forces to vital points—To the valour and endurance of all those troops who fought over the severe mountain regions through MUBO, KOMIATUM and TAMBUR to SALAMAUA—To those who moved many miles by sea and by air and marched and fought the enemy to a finish at LAE itself. It was due to the skilful planning of the staff and the bold and able leadership of the Commanders of all grades.

Members of the services of all grades gave their full strength to meet the demands of the fighting troops—To them is due their meed of honour.

The enemy remnant fled and few will escape the hardship of the mountain tracks.

Again the superiority of the combined Allied forces has been overwhelmingly demonstrated.

We will move steadily forward to the end and Victory.

## Convoy in The Huon

**S**HORTLY before dawn on September 4, the 9th Division convoy nudged through the calm waters of the Huon Gulf. Out in front, not visible yet in the murky blackness, was a short strip of beach—"Red Beach"—and beyond it the jungle.

This was the first amphibious task the Australian Army had undertaken. It was to be the first full-dress land-and-fight assault in which Australian troops had been engaged since Gallipoli, 28 years earlier. It was to be the 9th Division's first battle in the South West Pacific Area. Proved desert fighters from Tobruk and El Alamein, they had had no experience of actual fighting in the jungle.

But, crouching on the decks and in the holds of the ships edging toward that water-lapped waste, just a tree-fringed mud spot on the Huon Peninsula, they faced their test with a confidence born not entirely of their African victories.

Accompanying them on their mission, and located aboard an escorting destroyer, was their new G.O.C., Major-General George F. Wootten. He had proved himself as a jungle fighter—as a brigadier of 7th Division, at Milne Bay, and later at Buna and Sanananda—and he knew that his command was trained to the highest degree, and that the self-confidence of the 9th was well-based.

Long preparation and training had gone to the making of this drive. Behind were the lessons of amphibious tests in Europe and Africa, and of jungle fighting in Papua and New Guinea, and the knowledge that, given leadership and equipment, the Australian soldier, to whatever division he belonged, would establish quickly his mastery over the Japanese. The Command knew he had the equipment, armaments and supplies. He was assured of support by sea and from the air. Above all, the task had been predesigned

to the smallest detail and the last second. Wave after wave—troops, weapons, supplies; troops, weapons, supplies—were to be thrown on Red Beach in the smashing opening minutes of this all-arms, all-in assault.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Augury of Victory.**

Moving inexorably to another Australian victory, the 9th had come from the battlefield of an earlier Australian triumph—Milne Bay, where just a year before, world history was made when Australian troops and airmen stopped the enemy's southward drive.

September 1 was embarkation day. In steamy morning heat the troops had converged on the palm-edged beach in green-clad files, sweating under their loads of gear and weapons, splashing through the dawn rain's residue of mud, with disregard for everything except the job ahead.

On the beach—that beach at the end of Turnbull Strip, the capture of which had been the climax to the battle of Milne Bay—

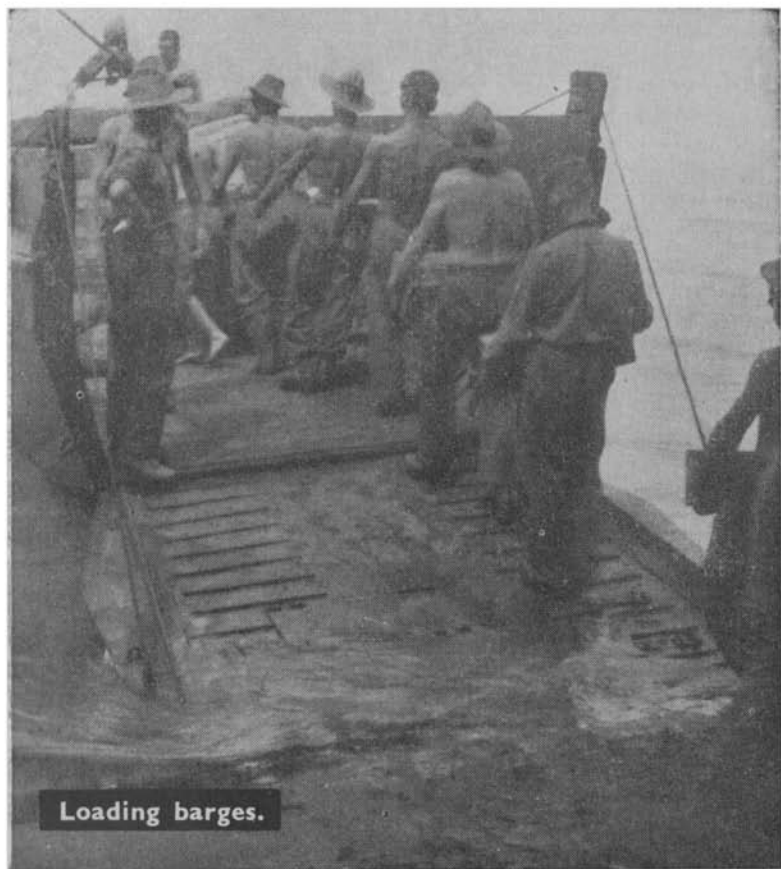


**Barging up the Coast.**

they had dispersed among the ragged, trampled growth choking the boles of neglected coconut palms. And there they had waited, with the utterly calm and tensionless good-humour of perfectly trained, battle seasoned, fighting fit troops.

Milne Bay was choked that day—choked with every conceivable type of craft. Destroyers quietly shepherded the huge L.S.T.'s, whose gaping doors swallowed the troops and tons of equipment as they poured in on the shore line. Just out a little way in the still waters of the Bay, A.P.D.s' and L.C.I.'s puffed contentedly as L.C.V.'s and L.C.M.'s—smaller types of amphibious assault craft—came alongside to transfer troops and weapons. Tankers were busy refuelling the then "mystery" ships. On the horizon corvettes kept watch, while protecting aircraft wheeled and climbed.

A clock-work embarkation presaged a precisely timed landing. Within the hour the first ships were under way. There were no



**Loading barges.**

hitches. The men were good ; their officers were good. They were a team, composite of years of living, sweating, fighting together as one.

Milne Bay was different from the Milne Bay of twelve months earlier. On this day of embarkation of the first amphibious operation, the anniversary of the Battle of Milne Bay was celebrated. Then, as now, Maj.-Gen. Wootten stood on the beach—then, as the commander of the 18th Infantry Brigade (7th Australian Division) ; now, as the G.O.C. of the 9th Australian Division, facing its first task in the New Guinea jungle.

### **Buna Interlude.**

There were nights of smooth sailing up the north coast of New Guinea to Red Beach. There was one clear morning with low shore lines coming up ahead—insignificant panorama after the mountains that slid back behind through the night. At Buna there were friends waiting on the beach. Companion troops were there to foster them on their way.

Two brigades of 9th Australian Division—20th, Brigadier W. T. V. Windeyer, and 26th, Brigadier D. A. Whitehead—had embarked at Milne Bay. The third brigade—24th, Brigadier B. Evans—welcomed them at Buna on September 3. There was a hot, satisfying breakfast, a few hours' swimming in blood-warm waters which only a few months ago had been blood-stained with the taken lives of fleeing Japs.

A year before Australian troops had to be thrown in pell mell, company by company, piece-meal. Now brigades could be moved calculatedly, where previously we rushed battalions, even companies. Because Australian troops had won yards before, they could now span hundreds of miles. Equipment was something to marvel at. The lessons of the jungle had been learned and applied.

The troop-carrying craft were better than anything the Australian Army had travelled in ever before. There were no miserable makeshifts, no fishing or copra luggers slinking along the dangerous coast by night, hunted by Zeros by day, stranded on reefs, broached on the beaches. These ships were made for success ; for the offensive that was about to begin.

And over all there were sea-power and air cover.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Landing.**

Dawn on September 4!

Dead ahead a low, misty shore line, then foothills, then towering peaks of the formidable Rawlinson Range.

Red Beach seemed the loneliest place on earth. The troops were silent. All their preparations had been made. They had breakfast on the best that was at hand. The flagship had ordered "Steak-and-eggs." The signal read: "Clean out your larders. Give the troops everything you can. This is our opportunity."

Suddenly the smooth bank of mist above the beach was torn in a hundred places and twisted into high, white columns of heavier, whiter vapour. Destroyers on either flank had opened fire. For six minutes they put down a barrage, concentrating on the fore-shore and the mouth of the Buso river.

At intervals of a half-mile or so, four evenly spaced lines of small craft were speeding toward the shore. They carried the shock troops—the infantry—and with them were members of an American engineer unit who had a job to do on the beach while the 9th Division pushed out the beach-head.

The small assault craft seemed to leap forward under cover of the naval-barrage. The first of them hit the beach at 6.30 a.m. The first troops ashore—men of the 2/15th and 2/17th Battalions—met no immediate opposition.

Preliminary surveys of the sea approaches to Lae had been carried out some time previously by the Royal Australian Navy, H.M.A. corvettes "Shepparton" and "Benalla" and H.M.A.S. "Stella" and "Polaris" had been engaged in that work—often under heavy air attacks by the enemy.

## **Running Commentary.**

Over beyond Lae, hidden in Japanese-occupied territory, an Australian observer, indifferent to his personal danger, was providing headquarters of New Guinea Force with a running commentary on the progress of the operation.

From him came, by radio, direct to General Sir Thomas Blamey and his staff, the first news of the successful landing, and the first assurance that the months of planning had been completely rewarded.

In the half-light of dawn, he sighted the convoy through binoculars, and broke silence at 6.13 a.m. with the report that the convoy was coming into sight, faintly visible against the pre-dawn light on the horizon.

Following this message, the observer for two and a half hours gave headquarters a staccato running commentary on the progress of the landing.

Highlights of his broadcast, made from within a mile of a Japanese camp, were:—

- 0625 hrs. Smoke screen being laid half-mile offshore. First craft entered smoke screen. No opposition from shore.
- 0640 hrs. Everything according to plan. Landing craft entered smoke screen. Still shelling shore; three destroyers close to shore. No. AA. May be small arms fire near shore. Cannot tell.
- 0645 hrs. Landing still going smoothly. No opposition as yet.
- 0650 hrs. Shelling now stopped. Convoy lying in Huon Gulf. No noise and no shellfire.
- 0702 hrs. Few fires noticeable in Lae drome hangars.
- 0815 hrs. Residential area still burning. Fires at Hillside Avenue. Our aircraft still circling. Barges to and from landing supplies from ships. Mitchell bombers heavily bombing plantation. Still further explosions inland. One large ship right into beach. Five more coming in.
- 0900 hrs. Large fires near point. Still six large ships near shore. Heavy explosions east to north-east Voco point. Residential area gutted by fire. Enemy activity in Lae. Three trucks now moving west along Markham Valley Road. There are two more trucks moving along. Our planes now bombing. One stick on Chinatown east side of Lae. One stick west side Chinatown. Chinatown and west still being heavily bombed.
- 0915 hrs. Large fires. Heavy bombing continuing. Direct hits on wharf and vacuum company. Six heavy AA guns firing accurately.
- 0930 hrs. Heavy black smoke pouring from Voco Point possible site naval gun. Fires in Chinatown and Vacuum Coy. AA gun in west has been silenced. Direct hit Voco and Vacuum.  
Six large vessels now right into shore. Residential area still burning. Everything else quiet.

### **Air Attack.**

At Red Beach, the Australian infantry spearhead had moved into the jungle. American engineers had set markers to guide ashore the larger landing craft with the balance of the striking force. Later they set up their light A/A guns and generally were ready for beach control and defence which was their role under 9 Australian Divisional command.



By 7 a.m. engineers had begun preparing tracks from marked landing points for the following craft, getting ready for the major task of rushing hundreds of tons of supplies to dispersal points in the jungle. The L.C.I.'s—in appearance a cross between destroyer and corvette—were on the beach, and the troops were streaming down either side ramps into the knee-deep water.



Laying wire mesh on Red Beach.

Then the enemy struck back. Nobody saw his planes until they skimmed the tree tops above the beach. They had come from the direction of Lae—16 miles away—but none could say with any certainty that there were only three until they had dropped their bombs along the water-line and had gone. A direct hit was scored on one L.C.I., and a near-miss on another, causing casualties.

It was the first time that 9th Division troops had been subjected to Japanese bombing. Most of the casualties were suffered by the 2/23rd Battalion, which was to come under command of the 20th Brigade on landing. Casualties totalled six officers and 27 other ranks, the dead including the commanding officer of the battalion.

But this raid was no real interruption. Troops moved calmly from the ships across the beach and into the jungle. Squat open craft came in at 7.15 a.m. Down their flat nose-ramps came caterpillars, loaded jeeps and giant bulldozers dragging great swathes of linked wire mesh.

### Artillery Ashore

By 7.30 a.m. Bofors A/A guns were ashore and set up, ready for any renewed attack. The only real danger was from the air. Red Beach was beyond the range of the Japanese port batteries at Lae, and the men of the 9th were confident of their ability to deal with any enemy encountered ashore.

While caterpillars tugged 25-pdr. guns and Bofors ashore from the landing craft, bulldozers sliced the top from the beach. In their wake, men unfolded and linked 8 ft. x 10 ft. sections of wire mesh. A jeepable, two-way road went the entire length of the beach, thirty feet at a time, and in as many seconds. That was one little dovetail product of long planning.

Over the crest of the narrow, black-sand beach the bulldozers pushed into the jungle, carving out store bays, followed by the endless chain of men carrying materials of war—food and ammunition.

Within minutes a native pad from the beach to the deserted village of Buso 500 yards inshore, was a wide, foliage-littered track; within an hour it was a road, surfaced with steel mesh.

During that morning and in the early afternoon engineers and pioneers made, through and from the jungle, 3,000 yards of passable road. There was hardly a pause in all that first-hour activity to watch the heavy and medium bombers—the Fortresses and the Mitchells—and their attendant fighters, shuttling back and forth over the apex of the bright that contained Lae. The continuous “whoomppf! whoomppf!” of the bombs drew scarcely more attention than an occasional “That’ll shift the——.”

Air superiority had not been wishful thinking. Swift, high-flying Airocobras, Kittyhawks and Lightnings cruised steadily overhead. The promised air cover was there, and the troops ashore could work in peace.

## **Advance Begins.**

It seemed hours later—but it was only 8.15 a.m.—when the huge troop-carrying ships, bearing hundreds of men and scores of tons of vehicles, weapons and supplies, pushed into the beach.

As the infantry marched stolidly ashore, to be drafted into unloading parties to empty the holds of these mammoth invasion craft, the troops who had preceded them into the dawn were pressing far through the jungle.

Swinging round to left and right, they had gone cautiously along the native trails and through deserted villages, and had swept up to the line of the first big river—the Buso—and across. They were miles on their way. The first objectives were taken in their stride.

The next wave—infantry, then ships' labour corps, now infantry again—followed them quickly. They had shown the Australian aptitude for getting a job done . . . and done fast. They had shaved half an hour off the landing schedules. Doubters had said, at those day-long conferences when schedules were drawn up, that it could not be done in the time. Yet, it was done, done well, and a half-hour sooner than even the leaders, wise in their knowledge of what troops could do, had expected.

Then the companies, and later the battalions, were on the new track, thrust to the side by the continuous convoy of the stores they had just unloaded, moving up to support and eventually take over from the first dashing force.

They had to move fast. The leading troops had left them a long trail to cover by nightfall.

The plan for the landing at Red Beach by two battalions of 20th Brigade—2/15th and 2/17th Battalions—as the spearhead of the attack, and for the unloading of stores by 26th Brigade, Divisional troops and the U.S. engineers, was executed to the letter, and, except for the bombing, went without a hitch.

Suddenly, the beaches looked empty. The last transports were pulling out, moving toward the horizon to reform in convoy. The destroyers and the corvettes fussed about—sea strength was being maintained. The destroyers patrolled up and down the beach until the last living ship had gone, leaving the two crippled victims of the hit-and-run air attack to be picked up later.

## **Second Landing.**

While the main force was landing at, and spreading out from Red Beach, 2/13th Battalion effected a subsidiary landing at "Yellow Beach," immediately to the east of "Red Beach." Their task was Hōpoi Mission and to secure the right flank.

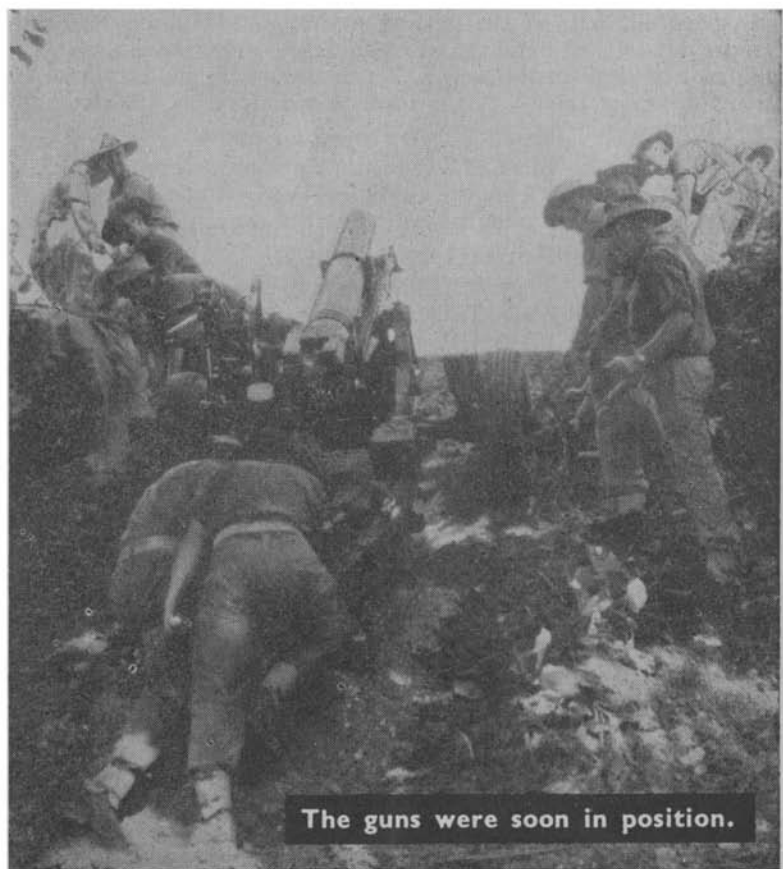
The 2/13th were the first troops to sight the enemy. A party of Japanese, about 20, was chased away without a fight, and there were other signs of the recent presence of the enemy.

The advance westward was the main drive. 2/17th Battalion came under command of the 26th Brigade and led the advance, while 2/48th Battalion (26th Brigade) was left in Division reserve to protect the established beach head.

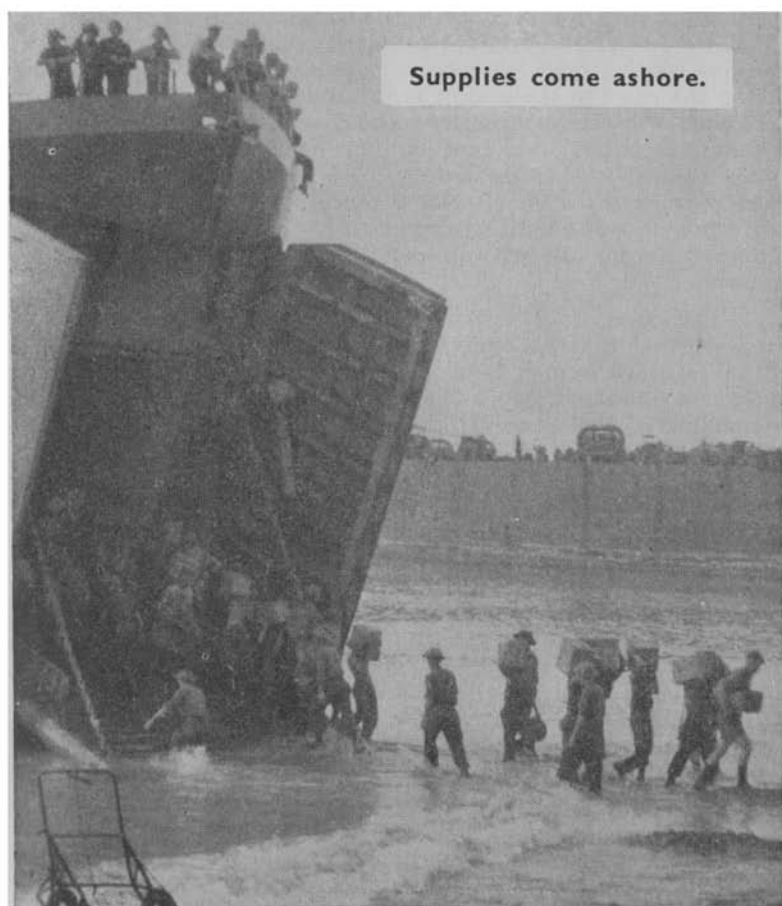
The village of Aluki, four miles west of the beach head, was occupied by nightfall of the day of the landing.

But the Japanese came back. They were expected in the evening, and three twin-engined planes came straight along the beach from the direction of Lae.

They unloaded their bombs along the short stretch of beach and destroyed or damaged a few tons of stores in one tiny section of the large area we had occupied. No one was killed.



The guns were soon in position.



In the whole day's activity of landing a complete invasion force the Japanese sent less than a dozen aircraft in pin-pricking harassment, which could not prevent or diminish our success.

Anti-aircraft fire brought down at least one enemy plane. It crashed on the beach, fifty yards from the water's edge. Pioneers souvenired its Rising Sun flag. It is doubtful whether the other raiders escaped.

Late that afternoon Japanese torpedo and dive bombers attacked another convoy of ships en route with more troops from Buna to Red Beach. It was just about the time the convoy returning from the dawn landing was due to pass and the alarm was sounded throughout both convoys. The ships were in the vicinity of Morobe.

Royal Australian Navy vessels, which had taken part in the landing, were also caught in the attack. H.M.A. "Fairmile," M.L. 817, which had been entrusted with the task of ensuring that the various landing craft were brought to their several dispersal areas along the coast to the assault rendezvous, was at times lifted clear of the water by bomb explosions, and almost swamped by descending columns of water. She kept her guns going, however, and had the satisfaction of seeing the enemy force withdraw. Although completely ringed by near-misses and repeatedly hit by bomb splinters, she was able to reach Milne Bay under her own power. Most of her crew received small wounds during the action though none was serious.

The huge L.S.T.'s were singled out by the Japanese bombers and, although the attack was vicious and desperate, it was unsuccessful. Two of the huge landing craft were damaged. One torpedo holed the side of one ship, and a near miss by a bomb caused casualties on another. At least two of the planes, which attacked from almost deck height, were shot down by anti-aircraft fire from the top decks of the L.S.T.'s. Both ships were later towed to Morobe where they were beached.

"Everyone did his job magnificently," the G.O.C. said on the evening of that first day. "Our tactical planning, the United States Navy's execution of the movement plan, the progressive landing of troops and supplies and the immediate developmental work of American and Australian engineers and pioneers—all did an excellent job. Everything happened just as it was planned, and we even beat scheduled time by a half hour. The whole complicated operation was designed to put a military force ashore. Those soldiers have come in and are well ahead of their job."

Meanwhile . . . . .

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## The Seventh Prepares

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**I**n the Port Moresby area, 7th Division command had been preparing for weeks for the second phase—the air-borne attack on Lae down the Markham Valley.

It was to be a race between the 7th and the 9th Division—a prelude to the grimmer and more difficult fighting when the two divisions again separated; the 7th to drive the Japanese from the Markham and Ramu Valleys; the 9th to clear him out of Huon Peninsula and prepare the way for the American landing in New Britain.

Seventh Division command comprised at this stage, as well as the 18th, 21st and 25th Brigades and associated units, a regiment of American paratroops, air-borne engineers and aerodrome defence units, 2/6th Independent Company, 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion, 6th M.G. Battalion, and a company of Papuan Infantry Battalion. All were under the leadership of Major-General G. A. Vasey.

In July and August green-clad, thoroughly fit Australians—rested and rehabilitated after their gruelling campaign through the Owen Stanleys and at Gona, Buna and Sanananda—had been brought back to New Guinea from the mainland. Well-disciplined American paratroops were flown in. Squadron after squadron of new planes of the 5th U.S. Air Force droned over the port. Douglas transports in numbers not seen previously in New Guinea were waiting to lift the 7th Division over the ranges.

Preliminary signal of the coming offensive was a review, in Pom Pom Valley late in August, by General Sir Thomas Blamey of the famous 25th Brigade. They were hard and fit and impatient for the coming battle. The Commander-in-Chief recalled what they

had done—the nasty, short war that was Syria, the campaigns of Kokoda and Buna (the hardest, he said, ever fought by the A.I.F.). The little beast faced them again, but man for man they were his superior, General Blamey said. They had proved that before, and they would prove it again.

### **Nadzab the Key.**

Success of the 7th Division's attack on Lae depended upon possession of the air strip at Nadzab. This had been made before the war as an emergency landing ground for the fleet of Junkers transports and small passenger craft which were the normal means of travel for Europeans in the district. Just below it, on the Markham itself, was the large Gabmatzung Mission conducted by the German Lutherans.

From Gabmatzung ran the road to Lae known now as the Markham Road. Gabmatzung to Lae by this road was between 24 and 26 miles.

For eighteen months after the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles had ceased their vital delaying action in the Markham Valley the kunai grew at will over the Nadzab strip—almost it seemed forgotten by the war. Every fortnight or so half a dozen Japanese would pad through the tawny kunai and ferret through the slowly collapsing buildings of Gabmatzung Mission.

Occasionally a patrol of the Papuan Infantry, native soldiers, led by an Australian officer, would cross the Markham and do the same thing. There was a clash or two.

But Nadzab was not forgotten. The fingers of the Allied command were placed many times during those eighteen months on its pinpoint in the map of New Guinea.

The map shows why Nadzab was so important to us—and, indeed, to the Jap. if only he had realised it. The Markham and the Ramu are two of the great rivers in New Guinea. Untrustworthily navigable for a distance, they rise close to each other on the fringe of the Huon Peninsula, and then snake down to the sea in opposite directions. The Markham reaches the sea near Lae, the Ramu comes out between what were at this time the two great Japanese bases of Wewak and Madang. Although both these rivers rise in the rugged New Guinea mountains, there is no acute watershed between the two streams. One passes from the valley of the Markham to the valley of the Ramu with hardly any perceptible difference in the terrain. This means that the valleys of both rivers form one long, broad platform for the passage of troops.

This (for New Guinea) long stretch of flat going, neatly slices the bulge of the Huon Peninsula from the main body of the island. The great valley presented the easiest course to the northern Japanese garrisons. He who held Nadzab challenged the valley—and Lae.



The Japanese did not foresee this move. He displayed again his lack of imagination. How could the Australians ever penetrate the miles and miles of mountains between the Markham and their foremost bases? Not while he held Lae, anyhow.

But they did.

A complex and daring plan for the investment of Nadzab was evolved. The first step was the building of an airstrip at Tsili-Tsili, fifty miles further south of Lae than Nadzab, and on the opposite bank of the Markham. Here an advance fighter base was established in a pretty and unwarlike plain at the foot of a great kunai-covered hill, and from this base the first move was made in the long victorious campaign.

### **The Pioneers Arrive.**

To Tsili-Tsili long lines of Douglas transports brought all sorts of equipment—heavy signalling gear, collapsible boats, rubber boats, food of every tinned variety, with an accent on bully beef and biscuits, axes, spades, a crosscut saw or two, and ammunition, a lot of ammunition. Finally, they brought the 2/2nd Pioneers and 2/6th Field Company, Signallers and Ambulance personnel.

Even at Tsili-Tsili, itself a secret base and a puzzle to the Japanese, the Pioneers and the Engineers were a secret. Carefully their C.O. disguised his purpose, sending out his men into the surrounding jungle, where they assembled their equipment.

The airfield at Tsili-Tsili lies near the swift, barely-navigable Watut River, one of the richest gold-bearing streams in New Guinea. The Watut races on for several miles past Tsili-Tsili until it junctions with the broad, yellow stream that is the Markham, and which, about 20 to 25 miles from Lae as the crow flies, swirls past the south-east end of the Nadzab airstrip.

It was planned that the pioneers with a train of 800 natives (the largest ever attached to an individual unit of the Army) should march over the fifty to sixty miles of land which separated Tsili-Tsili from Nadzab. They would leave Tsili-Tsili on September 2, and must complete the trip by the night of September 4/5—little enough time as much climbing had to be done and very uncertain swamp country had to be crossed or skirted.

The engineers were to wait at Tsili-Tsili, and then embark on the turbulent waters of the Watut in 12 large collapsible boats, taking all the heavier gear. Swinging out of the Watut, they would ride the shoals of the Markham to Kirkland's Crossing, on the south bank of the Markham, just above Nadzab, where the pioneers would be awaiting them.

On the day after their arrival, the greatest number of paratroops ever used in the Pacific war would drop on the air strip at Nadzab and overcome any enemy opposition. From the other side of the river, the pioneers would immediately construct a bridge of the

engineers' boats (if any were left), cross the Markham and, if necessary, fight their way through to the Americans. Once through, their job was to prepare the air strip (thought to be obstructed) for the Douglas transports which would bring the 7th Division in from Port Moresby.

It was an elaborate plan, requiring the highest degree of co-ordination, timing and secrecy to be effective. But it was effective—one hundred per cent. effective. Organisation was perfect.

#### **Water Hazards.**

There may have been little to choose between the arduous tasks of the two groups of Australian soldiers who set out from Tsili-Tsili on September 1. But it is certain that the river trip was the more hazardous.

The engineers were prepared for 50 per cent. casualties in boats and equipment—perhaps in men.

Except for occasional patches—holes in the bed rather than anything else—neither the Watut nor the Markham is a deep river.





But both are very fast and all along are constantly changing shoals. Sometimes these shoals are just below the surface, sometimes a foot or two down ; often they build up to make islands that were not there the day before. There were, too, treacherous, hidden snags. The snags were the engineers' greatest fear.

The journey from Tsili-Tsili to where their comrades waited by the Markham took the engineers 20 hours—something like half of them in pitch darkness.

They lost three ships and their equipment, and one man was drowned. Groping their way down the river, which was running at great speed, one boat struck a submerged log, forcing a boat deep down into the water under the stern of another. It was here one man drowned.

For the rest of the time they played blind man's buff with one of the most uncompromising rivers in the world. Of the 20 hours they spent afloat on its broad, brown, treacherous back, they spent five knee—often waist—deep in icy cold water, pushing and shoving the boats off the sandbanks.

They got through with practically all of their equipment intact, arriving at the rendezvous in the early morning of September 4. They were tired and rather drawn, but exultant, perhaps surprised that they had made it with so little mischance.

### **The Men who Walked.**

Of all the combined operations aimed immediately at the capture of Lae, that most likely to be overlooked was physically the toughest.

It was the 55-mile march by the 2/2nd Pioneers and their 800 bearers. Its toughness sprang from the fact that the long, winding column had to keep to an exact schedule, avoiding open country, marching through rivers, swamps, kunai and over mountains.

Although personal equipment was kept to a minimum—no change of clothing other than a pair of socks—each man carried between 60 and 80 lbs. They carried with them machine-guns, mortars, ammunition, radios, rations and rubber assault boats, the last-named for crossing the swift-flowing Wampit. Every man had to be a good swimmer.

There were severe surprises in the terrain. On the first day, September 1, between five and six miles were covered. There was tougher going ahead. Twelve miles was the second day's tally, with enemy planes about at night, and consequently no fires.

The third day began with an almost vertical climb of 1200 feet, followed by swamps and more climbing, to be rewarded by the spectacle of a seemingly endless train of bombers pounding distant Lae.

Adding to the exactions of the terrain were bees—little native stingless bees—more bothersome than flies and twice as persistent. Every time the men halted in the jungle they swarmed, seeking the salt from their sweat, and they had to be fanned off with hats. And never a breeze; although the tall jungle above swayed in the wind, it never reached the twilight below.

There have been harder marches in New Guinea, but never one so well-timed over such difficult country. Comfort there was, though, in the droning, incessant flight of the fighter screen above, protecting the little-seen, snaking column from the Japanese reconnaissance.

While the 9th Division was landing on Huon Gulf, the pioneers were forcing the pace. Saturday, September 4, began with an eight-mile march through swamps, followed by a climb up another "hill" obstacle, and then a hazardous climb down because the descent was so steep.

### **The Taking of Nadzab.**

September 5, saw the Australian pioneers and engineers, their mission by land and river completed to exact schedule, on the south bank of the Markham, opposite Nadzab.

And there the sweat-soaked, bearded Australians saw the greatest sight so far in the Pacific war—the paratroop occupation of the Nadzab strip.

Shortly after 10.30 a.m. on September 5, the waiting engineers and pioneers heard a tremendous roar from behind the mountains; the roar mounted to a thunder, and rounding the shoulder of the hills came the greatest aerial caravan ever seen in the Pacific.

### **Paratroops**

First came the fleets, squadron after squadron, of American medium bombers, above them weaving their fighter cover. They roared overhead, intent on the bombing of the Markham Valley Road. If the Japs. were there the bombers would give them something to go on with while the operation proceeded.

Then, in scores, came the transports. The valley was planes from end to end. Underneath them great flocks of white cockatoos and hornbills swirled in alarm.

The natives in the long boy-line goggled. The Australians laughed and shouted and clapped each other on the back, lips moving noiselessly under the roar of the engines. These were men, many of them, from the Middle East and the Owen Stanleys. They had had great numbers of planes over them before—but they had not been ours.

A bomber, in the distance where lay the goal of Nadzab strip came down, down to the level of the trees. As it passed, there mounted the growing glory of a huge smoke screen, dwarfing to a pin-point its author—the bomber. Down came line after line of transports flying 12 abreast, appearing to fly straight into the smoke-screen.

Then it was as though the transports had released confetti against the white smoke, which still mounted into the sky. The parachutes opened—blue, yellow, black, red, white, tan, grey. A second or two and the men dropped from view behind the trees.

The Australians on the south bank rushed on to Nadzab. To reach the strip they had to cross the Markham. Here they used the engineers' boats. They drifted down the stream, men manning the oars at the stern for all the world like Manly surf boats. At the

predetermined position they cast out their big anchors and turned on their outboard engines against the  $5\frac{1}{2}$  knot stream.

In that stream they made a folding boat bridge to carry the whole force and the 800 boys. The pontoon bridge was 80 yds. long and crossed the widest of three arms of the river formed by sand-banks. The other two were waded. The bridge had a walk of three poles of round bush timber and a courtesy handrail of rope. It took one hour and 25 minutes to make. Every man crossed safely with full equipment.

The Australians were now in Japanese territory. They pushed on cautiously; then with more confidence. There weren't any Japs. about. Surprise had been absolute. All day long the Australians cut their way through overgrown tracks to the air strip at Nadzab. At night they contacted the Americans.

The paratroops met them with cigarettes, chocolates, and chewing gum. They did not have so much themselves, but what they had they shared with the travel-worn Australians.

### **Guns from the Sky.**

When the Pioneers reached Nadzab one of the first things they saw was the artillery ready to shell down the Markham road, to tell the Japanese that Nadzab no longer slumbered. To their delight, they found it was an Australian gun, the short 25-pounder, Australian designed and produced, and about to go into action for the first time.

Only then did they know that there were Australians with the American paratroops when they jumped. There were 31 of them, trained artillerymen of the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment. Two weeks before they had been selected and told, quite bluntly, what was expected of them.

They were to become the first parachute artillery in the Pacific war. They would be expected to jump with the Americans and to take with them, in pieces, two of the new "cut-down" 25 pdrs.

They had one week's jump practice, the Americans showing them briefly how it was done. Then, from 1000 feet, they parachuted down. Only one was hurt in the landing, and he only slightly. For one officer, a last-minute addition to the party, it was his first jump. He liked it. So did the others.

Within two and a half hours the sweating artillerymen had ferreted the parts of the guns out of the kunai and were ready to register on the Markham Road. To retain the full element of surprise, however, the artillery was not used until the following morning.

Actually there was not a great deal for the pioneers to do to the strip. Flame-throwers dropped by the Americans had devoured the tall pit-pit grass and kunai, dissolving it in huge columns of acrid smoke. So completely did the flames do the job that the next day the first transport came spinning down to land in a huge cloud of dust and grit and burnt grass.

It brought the first jeep in its cargo. The foot-slogging pioneers seized on it with joy. It was the moving symbol of the success of the Nadzab operation.

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## The Ninth Advances

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**W**hile the paratroops were landing at Nadzab on September 5, and opening the second phase of the combined operation against Lae, forward troops of the 9th Division's advance along the Huon Gulf from Red Beach were patrolling into Singaua Plantation. The native village of Aluki—a few grass huts and a garden—had been occupied in the initial drive the previous day.

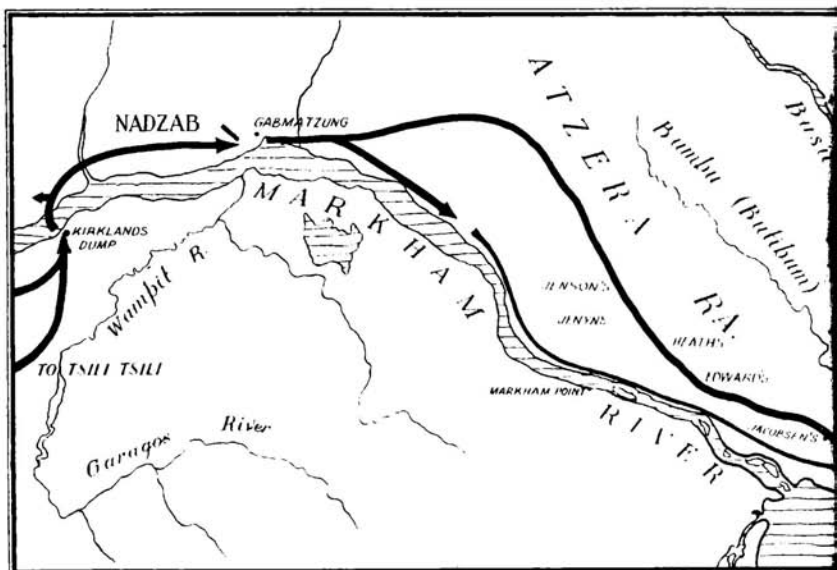
Back along the existent native pad connecting the village of Buso, across the Buso River, to Aluki, much had been done to make a jeepable road. The track had been widened in the jungle and kunai, and already the first stages of corduroying the muddy track through the thick jungle east of the Buso River had begun.

Engineers had thrown a bridge across the Buso, and traffic which had previously come along the black sand of the beach from Red Beach to the Buso, and up the Buso bed to rejoin the native pad, was diverted from Red Beach to Buso Village, and then directly west through the jungle.

Stores and equipment poured forward in the wake of the speeding troops, the bulldozers slashed the jungle and kunai pushing the road through. Field ambulance stations had been established. Everything was going to plan, and the weather was good.

Singaua Plantation, the first sign of civilised habitation the troops had encountered since their landing less than 24 hours before, was a little more than two miles west of Aluki. Bordered in the east by Apo fishing village on the coast, and Apo village a half-mile inland, the plantation was cut almost in the centre by the Huem River. Further to the northwest of Apo was Tali, about one and a half miles away.

The advance into the plantation was led by elements of the 2/17th Battalion. The rate of advance was being maintained



at a high tempo, but nothing left to chance. A careful watch was kept for lurking snipers—the lessons of previous New Guinea campaigns had been absorbed by these troops new to jungle fighting—and all avenues were guarded against enemy ambush.

While the coastal drive went through the plantation, other troops were swung to the north through Tali, and it was when the two arms of this force reached the Buim River that the troops were roughly half-way to Lae.

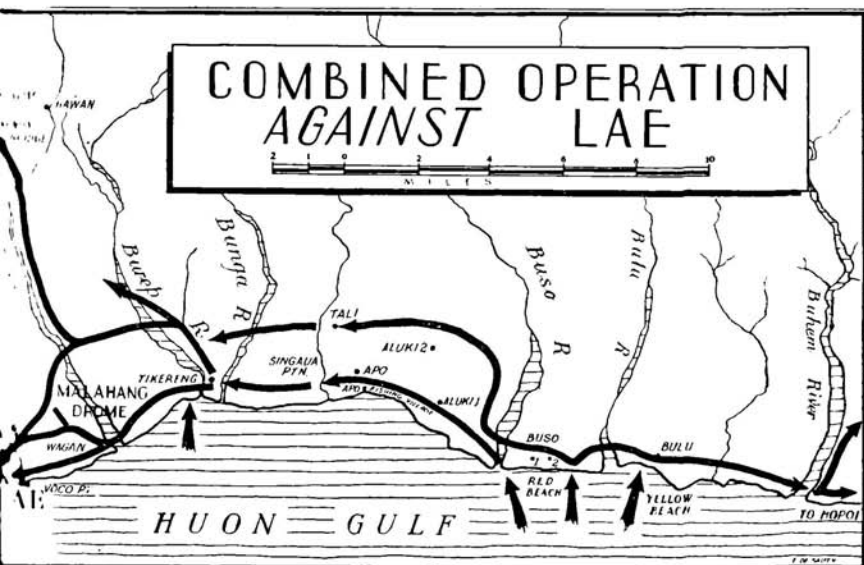
So far there had been no land opposition. Apart from his air attacks, on the beach and on the returning convoy, the enemy had stayed in his holes, and by dusk on the second day we had not found those holes.

### **Jap. Counter Fails.**

During the second night after the landing a body of Japanese, estimated at a company (about 160 men), by-passed the vanguard of the coastal column at the mouth of the Bunga River, about two miles to the west of Singaua Plantation.

But that attempt by the enemy to interfere with our advance was quickly frustrated. It was not clear what the enemy intended to do—whether he intended a frontal attack or whether he was going to try his old trick of infiltration—but whatever he had in mind will never be known for retribution was swift and sure.





The enemy had landed in barges west of the Bunga mouth and slipped quietly through the thick jungle—growing almost to the water's edge—along the beach toward the plantation. Our standing patrol at the river mouth watched him sneak by, and when the entire force had moved on, two volunteers from the 2/17th Battalion set out to warn our main coastal force then moving through the plantation.

Wading neck-deep in the sea these two volunteers paralleled the Jap. advance along the coast for more than a mile, and then came ashore ahead of the enemy. Their warning to the 2/23rd Battalion in the plantation was timely, and more than half the enemy company was killed in the first encircling movement. Those Japanese who withdrew were attacked, with heavy losses, at the mouth of the Bunga, and the few scattered remnants of the enemy force were mopped up later. A number, finding themselves trapped, blew themselves to pieces with grenades.

### Reinforcement.

Before first light the next morning, September 6, more 9th Division troops landed at Red Beach. They had enjoyed the sea trip, which was free from incident. Again the mud of the shelving beach was stirred as craft of all sizes, huge and small, hit the beaches and the troops spilled ashore. The main contingent was the 24th Brigade, which had embarked at Buna. Again there was the same

scene of ceaseless, bustling activity as stores, equipment and men were landed ; and again quiet efficiency made order out of seeming chaos.

On that morning Red Beach was not the lonely place that it had been two mornings previously. To these newcomers it had the appearance of a well ordered centre. Beach control officers were there to conduct the troops ashore to assembly areas : there were appointed places for every type of store ; jeeps, trucks, more bulldozers and more tractors rumbled down the ramps.

But, like their comrades on the day of the landing, they were not destined to be on Red Beach very long before they felt the sting in the Japanese tail. He came at mid morning.

The only warning was the whine of his plane engines just before he began his pattern bombing. The thick foliage prevented the troops from having a good look at him from their dispersal areas, but the nearness of the bombs told them all they wanted to know. He was right on the mark again. He followed his pattern bombing with dive bombing, and then cleared off as quickly as he had come.

His bombs claimed some casualties, again hit the beach and holed the new road from the beach to Buso village, but the sound of his engines had scarcely died away before the engineers and pioneers were on the job repairing the damage to the road. The life-line—that road was the life line of stores from Red Beach to the forward troops—had to be maintained.

About lunch time he came again—this time along his favourite track, a swoop over the trees along the beach from the direction of Lae. This time we were more prepared, and he got as good as he gave. His strafing run with three aircraft was challenged by a heavy A/A barrage from the beach defences. Ammunition of all calibres was thrown up at him, and he did not attempt a return journey.

### **Advance Continues.**

Up at the “front” the spearhead of the coastal advance—elements of the 2/17th Battalion—moved north to Tali and the battalion, now concentrated, reverted to the command of its Brigade, 20th Brigade.

That move allowed the 2/24th Battalion to take up the lead when it moved through the 2/23rd Battalion and the assault was carried over the Bunga River towards the Burep River, half a mile away. Co-incident with the advance of the 2/24th Battalion, a company of the 2/23rd Battalion was detached from the coastal force and sent about 800 yards inland to Tikereng, a village nestling in the dense jungle on an arm of the Burep River and half-way between the Bunga and Burep Rivers.

By afternoon, 24th Brigade was well on the move from Red Beach to join with 26th Brigade. It was proposed that the advance on Lae should be carried out as a two-brigade front. The fresh troops moved quickly over the track—between Buso and Aluki—passing the huge supply dumps, food and stores, that were being shifted forward away from the beach head.

## The Seventh Flies In

**W**ith Nadzab strip in our possession, and the 9th Division pushing quickly along Huon Gulf to Lae, September 6 saw the inauguration of the biggest aerial movement of troops yet undertaken in the South-West Pacific Area.

Loaded to capacity with men of the 7th Division and their equipment, Douglas transports shuttled between Port Moresby, Tsili-Tsili and Nadzab as though operating on a suburban railway time-table.

One of the first men in at Nadzab was Major-General Vasey. His tall figure dominated the strip, where everyone—soldiers, airmen and natives—worked indefatigably in intense heat and choking dust and ashes thrown up by the slipstreams.

There was no pause in the aerial movement other than that dictated by weather until the divisional force—with stores, equipment, guns and ammunition—had been transported according to plan. Under the constant drive of landing wheels, dust grew ankle-deep on Nadzab strip. Conditions became as bad on another strip, four and a half miles from Nadzab, which was brought into use within two days.

This aerial movement, and the rapid accomplishment of the first objective, brought to the 7th the unofficial designation of "Australia's first air-borne division." For a time the novelty of the description appealed to men who had tramped across the Owen Stanleys a year before and who had ploughed through the swamps of the north New Guinea coast. But they reverted quickly to their foot-slogging role, and had little more experience of the speed of air travel until they had marched down to Lae and back up the Markham and Ramu Valleys.

The drive down to Lae was initiated by the 25th Brigade—2/25, 2/31 and 2/33 Battalions—which the Commander-in-Chief had reviewed a few days before.



**Gabmatzung Mission became a field ambulance.**

From the strip they marched to Gabmatzung Mission, which lies at the very start of the Markham Road. Here, in the mission's tumbled-down, long-abandoned buildings the field ambulance was established. The big thatched chapel, cool and airy, with the pulpit still standing in the corner, became the hospital. Sunlight filtered through holes in the roof where, during the Japanese occupation, our strafing bullets had torn the thatch.

The track from Nadzab to Lae proceeds east for about seven miles to Yalu, and then skirts the foothills of the Atzera Range in a south-easterly direction, passing through dense jungle and overgrown and thickly vegetated plantations. The track, under the strain of military traffic, deteriorated rapidly into a quagmire. South of the track, to the northern edge of the Markham River, was an area of swamp, through which movement was extremely difficult.

With 2/25 Battalion leading, followed as they arrived, by the 2/33 and 2/31, the 25th Brigade, impatient after two days' delay caused by the weather, took over as they went, on September 7, 8 and 9, from the be-grimed and bearded paratroops.

They made their first contact with the enemy on September 10.

## The Trap Closing

**O**n the morning of September 7, the situation of our troops was heartening. Everything had been implemented according to the plan on which the command had worked months in advance.

The combined operation, involving the co-ordinated employment of every arm and every service available in the area to the Australian command, had become already a text-book pattern.

We were not sure of it then, but the Japanese command at Lae was beginning to realise how it had been trapped. Only now did the enemy begin to appreciate the strategy of many months that had enticed him to pour troops through Lae and Salamaua into the killing pen of those ridges beyond where units of the 6th, 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions had successively eliminated all opposition that had faced them.

And now the strategical pattern had been completed with the amphibious landing of the 9th Division and the air-borne movement of the 7th.

Salamaua had not yet fallen, but the 5th Division, under the command of Major-General E. J. Milford, was ready for the final strike according to time-table; the U.S. Navy had cut Lae off from sea-borne aid; 9th Division had closed the beach route to the east; the U.S. paratroops, Australian paragoons and 7th Division had closed the road into the Markham Valley; U.S. 5th Air Force and the R.A.A.F. dominated the air.

As the net closed in the next ten days, the only line of retreat left to the Lae garrison became the native tracks through the mountains to the north-west. Some did slip away, but it was escape only from the retribution of the Australian divisions; few could have survived the inevitable starvation of the Finisterre trails.

## Two-Brigade Drive.

On the Huon Peninsula, 9th Australian Division after its surprise landing on September 4 on that 400 yards of mud called Red Beach, had by September 6 initiated a drive which was creeping forward on a two-brigade front. The 24th Brigade which had joined the 26th Brigade had made the execution of that plan possible. It was planned that the 26th Brigade should move through the hinterland and that the 24th Brigade should continue along the coast.

The 26th Brigade moved north-west up the Burep River. The almost dry bed allowed easy passage for motor transport, and stores and equipment were diverted off the beach road in the wake of those men.

At the same time 24th Brigade, headed by the 2/28th Battalion, secured a bridgehead over the mouth of the Burep River. The early acquisition of this bridgehead was important at this stage, but its importance became even more apparent as the troops closed in on Lae.

Artillery—long and short-barrelled 25-pounders—was brought up from Red Beach and was placed in position on the Burep and on its eastern arm round toward Tikereng village. Its task was to support the advance of the 24th Brigade, and at the same time harass the enemy in the Lae area.

Way back behind the advance and Red Beach, the 2/13th Battalion (20th Brigade), which had landed at Yellow Beach on the same day as the assault on Red Beach, pushed east, on toward Hopoi Mission. The 2/17th Battalion of the same Brigade had, of course, led the initial advance from the beach and had been reformed at Tali on September 6, while the third battalion of the Brigade remained in its static defence role inland from Red Beach.

The manouevring of the 24th and 26th Brigades and the bringing forward of the artillery, meant that the assault on Lae was to be intensified. The 26th Brigade was to cut off any attempted escape by the enemy, while the edge of the wedge was to be driven strongly by the 24th Brigade. Both brigades were to drive from the Burep River toward the fast-flowing Busu, and once across that treacherous stream the six battalions were to fan out and advance on a wide front.

The process of securing the right flank of this two-brigade front, also of sealing exits from Lae, continued next day—September 8—when forward elements of the 2/17th Battalion reached Kalsia, and the 2/4th Independent Company moved toward Kunda Bridge, high on the Busu River and north-east of Lae.

On the coast the 24th Brigade was going well. Once across the river, a crossing that presented no hazards at all, the troops met only small bodies of retiring enemy. They showed little fight and our progress was not impeded.

Up the Burep, 26th Brigade troops had reached the point where they were to go bush and strike through to the Busu River. It was approximately five miles inland.

By nightfall of September 8 they had hacked their way through the jungle to the eastern bank of the Busu. It had been a compass march, fighting thick undergrowth and mud all the way.

Road building and engineering projects were developing into a problem now. The road from Red Beach had reached Apo, but had been churned by the continual traffic, and, in places was a quagmire. The whole advance was being hampered far more by the nature of the country than by the enemy. The jungle was imposing a barrier which slowed the advance and tired the men, who had to hack their way through it.

But, with all these natural difficulties, everything was going smoothly. The bridge, which had been thrown across the Busu River on the day after the landing, was standing up to the strain of the heavy traffic, and the road was sufficiently secure to make it a lifeline. Later it was continued to Apo fishing village, and from there along the coast to Busu River, where small boat ferries made the connection with the beach road to Lae.

### **Busu River Crossing.**

On September 9, the 9th Division troops faced their first serious barrier in their advance on Lae. Five miles inland the 26th Brigade contemplated the rushing waters of the Busu River, while down on the coast the 24th Brigade wondered how it was going to effect a safe passage across this same river, which was much wider at its mouth.

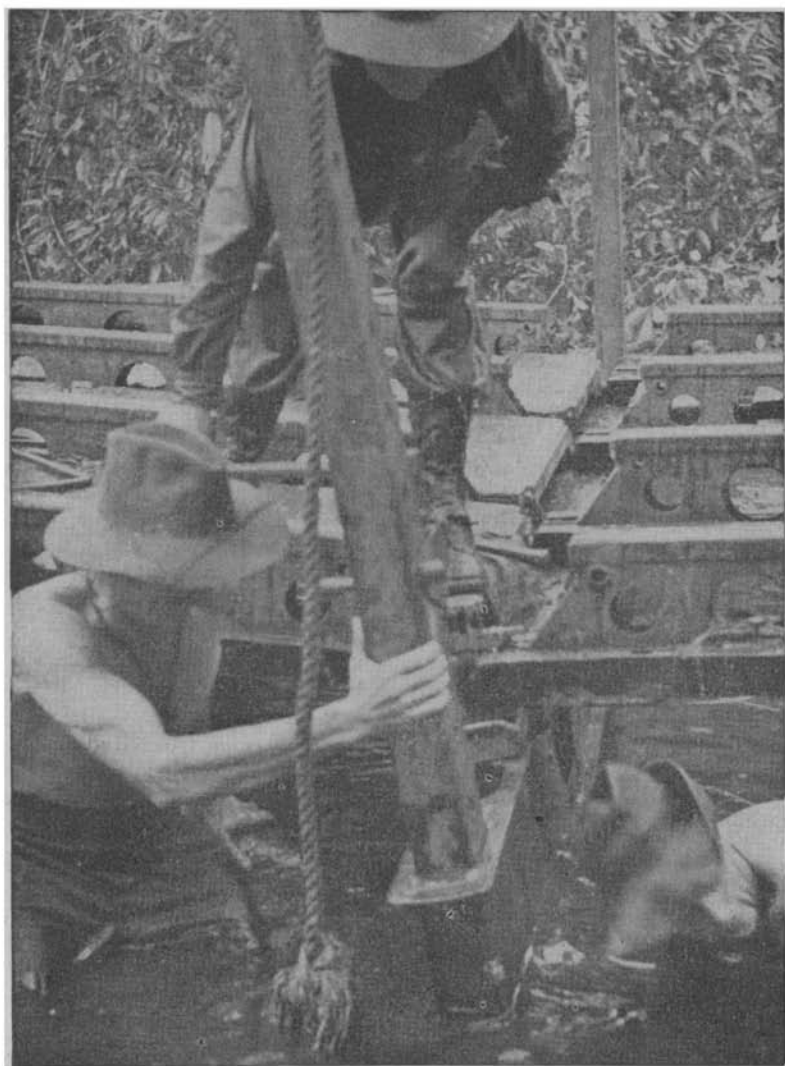
In the morning light the wide, swift-flowing river did not present an encouraging picture. The troops knew that the crossing was to be perilous, and—although there was no sign as yet—it was obvious that this was where the enemy would make a stand. The troops had crossed four streams in their advance from Red Beach, but the Busu was totally different. The river seemed to be a bigger problem than the possibility of enemy lurking in the jungle on the other bank.

The Busu River, with the Markham, comprises the main drainage system for the vast reservoir of mountainous north-eastern New Guinea. At its mouth it is 700 yards wide, broken by bare or lightly-covered gravel shoals into a series of channels, of which that on the extreme west carries the main stream, 50 yards in width and up to six feet deep.

Heavy rain on the night preceding the crossing had swollen the stream into a torrent which surged down to the sea at 10 to 12 miles an hour. A shallow sandbar narrowed the stream where it entered the Huon Gulf, and then the flood poured into the sea to form a huge expanse of yellow, which, grudgingly, the sea assimilated.

Obviously, the Japanese reckoned on any crossing by the Australians being made across this bar, regarding, with considerable justification, the stream higher up as impassable. This bar was to prove a haven for many men washed down to the mouth.

Up-stream the 26th Brigade determined that the river had to be bridged, and plans were framed accordingly. But, by this time,



Engineers strengthening a bridge to allow the artillery to come forward.



the 26th Brigade knew that the enemy was waiting on the western bank. Shots had been exchanged and casualties had been inflicted among our men.

### **Campaign Epic.**

The crossing of the Busu River at its mouth in the face of enemy fire was one of the outstanding accomplishments in the advance on Lae, and will be regarded as one of the epics of the Pacific war. The 2/28th Battalion acted as the spearhead of this crossing, which was imperative for the establishment of a bridgehead for the coastal advance.

Late on the dull afternoon of September 9 these men emerged from their jungle cover on their grim venture to attempt what seemed the impossible. The battalion had reached the eastern bank of the river and had sighted Japanese scouts on the far bank, but the enemy's strength and exact dispositions were unknown.

"Impassable to loaded men," was the report of experienced patrol leaders sent out to find a suitable crossing point and plans which had been prepared for a continuance of the advance at first light the next morning were abandoned.

There had been active patrolling throughout the night of September 8 and the next morning. A patrol, which had spent a rain-soaked night on a sparsely-covered island shoal, sent forward three scouts to examine the river. One reached the water's edge, but was picked off by enemy fire from the kunai grass near the bar. Further upstream another patrol more than balanced the account by killing two Japanese scouts.

The enemy was over there, and, as upstream, was watching and waiting.

By now it was quite clear that engineers, even under covering fire, could not hope to bridge the stream without bringing up heavy and cumbersome equipment. The alternative was a daylight advance into the unknown with all the odds against our troops.

Accordingly, plans were revised to provide for a frontal assault. It was now to be a fight by each individual using all the strength, courage and ingenuity which characterise the Australian soldier.

Preparatory to making the crossing the men discarded non-essential equipment, but carried with them rifles, sub-machine guns, grenades, ammunition, signal equipment and emergency rations. Stretcher bearers carried, in addition to their own packs, stretchers and haversacks crammed with medical appliances.

In grim silence, with the jungle behind, deep, tall kunai in front, and cloud-topped mountains to the north, and menaced by the ominous roar of the river, the first company began to leave the eastern bank in single file, wading through mud and shallow streams to the forming-up place, where there was some shelter from enemy observation.

### **Crouching Under Fire.**

" Three minutes to go. Check your gear ! "

" One minute to go. Cigarettes out ! "

The leading company commander's orders came back crisply to those waiting behind.

With rifles at the high port the van moved out silently into the open, extending to the right and left as they approached the margin. Soon the men were knee-deep in water, and as they felt their way foot by foot on the stony bottom the drag of the river began to take its toll.

Suddenly men were being hurtled toward the sandbar, only their tin hats and weapons showing above the water. Fortunately a drift veered most of them toward the opposite bank. Some, however, at the mercy of the racing stream, were borne headlong to the bar itself, where, in desperation, they clutched at two trees—one green, the other withered—which Providence seemed to have planted as a special haven of refuge.

Those men, pounded on one side by breakers and on the other by the torrent, drew the first enemy fire. It came from a heavy machine gun sited about 800 yards back and on a fixed line along the beach. Light machine guns quickly came into action from points behind the kunai, which, at times, seemed alive with tracers. Occasionally a mortar added to the cacophony.

### **No Faltering.**

But there was no pause in the advance.

It became quickly apparent that most of the fire was being directed along the beach, and that the high opposite bank would afford a measure of protection. Even so, here and there a man slumped before entering the water. It was a terrifying, but magnificent spectacle. Men were being swept away before their eyes, but succeeding waves of companies never faltered or broke formation. Here was a classic example of comradeship and discipline. Orders were unnecessary.

On the opposite bank, men who had negotiated the river, acted as traffic policemen. Oblivious of fire they directed their mates across the stream ; chopped down trees which could be grasped by struggling men as they were swept down stream ; held out rifles to be grasped, and formed human chains to succor hard-pressed men in midstream.

By devious means, such as holding on to huge spars or linked arms, the whole battalion crossed the Busu. The sight of men struggling to preserve the weapons which they had nursed with loving care under tropical conditions for their first encounter with the Japanese was unforgettable—for this was the first time the 24th Brigade had met this particular enemy. They had landed at Red Beach on the night of September 5/6, fresh troops for this new job with the 26th Brigade.

One man, swept across the bar and carried hundreds of yards out to sea, was borne westward and made the shore behind the

Japanese strongposts. Exposed to the enemy and fearing fire from his own mates, who by this time were guarding the beach approach, he swam, waded and crawled back to safety.

A dozen men were stranded on the bar, pinned down by fire from the Jap.'s heavy gun, and there they clung to the trees for six and a half hours until rescued by a party from the east bank.

### **Daylight—And Victory.**

Darkness found those that had managed to get across faced with the problem of reorganisation, always a difficult task in the jungle at the best of times and under the best conditions. The enemy was still maintaining his fire, although one machine gun had been silenced by a courageous single-handed action by a section leader.

Vivid lightning intermittently revealed a maze of tracks through the tall kunai grass and deep peals of thunder gave a bass accompaniment to the staccato machine gun burst and occasional mortar explosions.

Company commanders reported within an hour to an hour and a half of the crossing that they had taken up positions, and the Command was assured that the perimeter was safe. The securing of that perimeter was no mean feat in the kunai grass up to 15 ft. high, working in the dark, and considering that most of the troops had been swept away from one another as they negotiated the river. The men had dug in, but as fast as they dug rain filled the holes. This tropical downpour lasted throughout the night.

Daylight and intercommunication confirmed that the battalion front extended from the beach, through the kunai, to a creek following a semi-circular course back to the Busu—giving a perimeter of 650 yards and a maximum depth of more than 200 yards. An attempt was made that morning (September 10) to make a battalion advance, but that was frustrated by deep swamp immediately ahead.

While plans for a flanking attack were being made, the company on the left, or coastal flank, was being subjected to machine gun fire and grenades and mortars came in from the sea edge. It was decided that this company should dislodge the enemy from such vantage positions, and the time set was the afternoon.

Under cover of mortar fire and harassing Vickers' bursts, this company moved forward to inflict a sanguinary defeat on the Japanese. Despite withering fire, especially to the left, the platoons kept formation—discipline again outstanding—and soon were in the swamp.

"Be in this boys," one man yelled as, in water chest high, he mowed down cornered Japs. with his Bren at his shoulder. More than 60 enemy were killed and a number of machine guns captured in that intrepid move.

From that moment the advance along the coast toward Lae continued as quickly as it had begun. More of the 24th Brigade troops crossed the Busu on September 11, but upstream the 26th Brigade troops were still prevented from crossing the river by a combination of the swift current and accurate enemy fire. The Japanese was content to sit in his holes and harass our troops as they

struggled with the problem of bridging the turbulent stream. In the last couple of days they had brought artillery fire to bear on our concentration area back in the jungle behind the eastern bank of the Busu, and already had caused casualties.

### **25-Pounders Fire.**

While the 2/28th Battalion was attempting its crossing at the mouth of the Busu River, our artillery—the long and short-barrelled 25-pounders—which had been placed in position on the Burep River and its eastern arm, opened fire for the first time during the campaign. The guns had been dragged from Red Beach by caterpillar tractors and gun tractors, and manhandled across the rivers and swamps to vantage points. They could have brought down fire on Lae itself, but on September 9 their targets were Malahang, a mile east of Lae, where new earthworks had been revealed by air observation.

On the 26th Brigade front the rain on the night of September 9 had swollen the river to a frightening size. It had risen in a matter of minutes almost. It was too deep and fast to wade, and attempts to cross by line failed. A first rough bridge between the east bank and the central island was washed away and engineers with bridging equipment were called forward.

There was no doubt now that the enemy was watching every move from the opposite bank, and the attention that he was paying to the 26th Brigade movement pointed with certainty that he was aware of the Brigade's intention once it crossed the river. It could be assumed that he knew the 26th Brigade movement had been designed for swift encirclement of the Malahang area—which it had.

His shelling and mortaring of the eastern bank of the river caused casualties among our troops, and it was not long before he placed one heavy and four medium machine guns in commanding positions on the high western bank.

### **More Troops Arrive.**

During the night of September 10/11 a readjustment of troops in the Red Beach and Hopoi Mission areas was made necessary by the arrival of the 4th Brigade. It will be recalled that after landing at Yellow Beach on September 4, the 2/13th Battalion moved east along the coast toward Hopoi Mission. The 2/15th Battalion had a static defence role inland from Red Beach, and the other battalion of the Brigade (2/17th) had moved in the spearhead toward Lae.

The 22nd Battalion took over from the 2/13th Battalion on the eastern flank, and, moving east along the coast, later played an important part, with the rest of the 20th Brigade, in the fall of Finschhafen. On September 12 the 22nd Battalion occupied Hopoi Mission.

Relieved of its job as the spearhead of the attack, the 2/17th Battalion had reformed at Kali, and, prior to September 9, had moved on to the western bank of the Burep River where it assumed a protecting role for the artillery.

After being relieved by the 4th Brigade troops the 2/13th and 2/15th Battalions moved west along the coast in the wake of the advance toward Lae.

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## Markham Valley Road Battles

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**I**t was the eve of the capture of Salamaua, and the 9th Division troops were across the Busu River, when the leading battalion of the 7th Division first contacted the enemy on the road to Lae—the Markham Valley road—during the late afternoon of September 10.

At 4.35 p.m., a patrol of 2/25th Battalion located an enemy patrol near Jensen's plantation. The Japanese were outflanked on both sides, but slipped out of the trap under cover of darkness.

This was the beginning of the sharp battle of the road, which ended in the collapse of Lae. This road—a mere badly-drained car track—passes through, or is flanked by, plantations. These plantations carry the names of their former owners. Jensen's, Jenyn's, Whittakers, Heath's, Lane's, Vernon's, Edwards', Jacobson's, Diddyman's. Those are the names as they are passed on the road to Lae. They are now the names of battle-grounds to the men of the 25th Brigade.

Brig. K. W. Heather led the 25th down the road at such a rattling pace—for New Guinea—that the troops named him "Phar Lap." It was not easy going. The A.S.C. performed prodigies in keeping supplies of ammunition and food up to the swiftly-advancing men. One man drove for 52 hours on end, not once turning off the engine of his equally indefatigable jeep. The drivers churned down the road, heedless of mud, or obstacles, or of their own safety; behind them they towed a trailer as big as the jeep. On their way back they crawled along, tender as women in their care for the wounded who lay beside them.

The speed of the advance was not indicative of the severity of the task which the 7th Division carried through along the length of the road. Fighting in places was grim, and the stretchers in the chapel at Gabmatzung began to fill, while surgeons worked into the early hours of the morning.

As it had done in the Owen Stanleys and beyond, the 7th proved itself at all times superior to the enemy. Not all of the men had been with the division in the 1942 campaign; some of them were in action for the first time. But they destroyed those Japs. who stayed to fight—and in the early engagements they met the enemy in hundreds.

The Japanese were not frightened coolies, either. They were mostly marines—picked men, some wearing three foreign service awards. And in a campaign of this character it would have been a comparatively easy task for 100 men to delay a brigade for 48 hours, for the plantations, neglected since the Japanese landed at Lae, were overgrown, and had largely reverted to jungle, and provided excellent cover for a waiting enemy.

### **Pioneers and Gunners.**

From September 10, until Lae fell, the 2/2nd Pioneers guarded the flank of 25th Brigade, moving down river. They encountered some opposition, but not enough to satisfy them.

Attached, too, was 54th Battery, 2/4th Field Regiment which did a workmanlike job of plastering the Japanese positions, particularly as the targets were the sort that gunners do not especially like. They were close to our own infantry, but the 25-pounder is a faithful weapon and the man who is its master is the master of most targets, close or otherwise.

Sometimes it was difficult to restrain the determined infantry. Once an observation post officer suggested that an infantry section should fall back a little to give his guns a greater field of fire. But the infantrymen would not think of it. They had fought for the ground. Why go back? Let the gunners "have a crack"; they would take a chance where they were.

The 2/25th Battalion had the support of a troop of 54th Battery when they engaged an estimated 200 Japanese in the first major engagements slightly beyond Jensen's Plantation on September 11.

In fierce fighting, much of which took place at a range of 15 yards, a number of casualties was inflicted on the enemy, who was forced to yield ground. Artillery support was so good and so well handled, that Australian troops were able to direct fire into enemy positions only 20 yards in front of them.

The 2/25th Battalion drove the Japanese beyond Whittaker's Plantation, and by late afternoon on September 13, the Battalion was firmly astride the track at Whittaker's Bridge. Two companies pushed along the high ground in the foothills of the Atzera Range and reached a position overlooking Heath's Plantation. During the night, these companies held their ground against determined counter attacks. At 9.30 a.m. next day, the battalion crossed the bridge and attacked. Stubborn resistance was offered from well dug-in positions, but Heath's was taken in the early afternoon, when the Japanese, after losing nearly 300 killed, again withdrew under 2/25th Battalion pressure.

## Kelliher's V.C.

It was here in the overgrown Heath's that Private Richard Kelliher of the 2/25th Battalion won the Victoria Cross.

On the morning of September 13 he moved in with a platoon of "B" Company. As they felt their way through the plantation a group of Japanese marines firmly entrenched on a slight rise overlooking their positions opened up on them from 50 yards. So fierce and accurate was the Japanese fire that immediately five of the platoon were killed and three wounded.

In the face of these casualties, the citation stated :—

*"Private Kelliher suddenly, on his own initiative, and without orders, dashed toward the post and hurled two grenades at it, killing some of the enemy but not all. He then returned to his section, seized a Bren gun, again dashed forward to within 30 yards of the post and, with accurate fire, completely silenced the post."*



**Pte. R. Kelliher, V.C.**

*Having returned from his already gallant action, Pte. Kelliher requested permission to again go forward and get his wounded section leader out. This he successfully accomplished, though under rifle fire from another position. Pte. Kelliher by these actions acted as an inspiration to everyone in his platoon, and not only enabled the advance to continue but also saved his section leader's life.*

*Pte. Kelliher's action electrified everyone who saw it and his company as a whole, besides directly resulting in the capture of the enemy position, which was later found to contain one officer and eight other ranks enemy dead."*

Private Kelliher, a 38-year-old Irishman, whose mother lives in Ballybeggan, Tralee, County Kerry, tells the story a little differently :

"A party of Japanese marines—and well-fed they were too—occupied a small ridge in Heath's Plantation near Lae and were able to overlook our positions along the track. The opposition was pretty stiff, because it was apparently headquarters, and we were held up. When we cut a telephone line leading from the headquarters, the Japanese became a bit demoralised. Our section leader, Cpl. 'Billy' Richards, went down with a bullet through his shoulder, and appeared to be losing a fair amount of blood. Another man was shot through the ankle, and a third was wounded. All lay out in No Man's Land.

"I wanted to bring Cpl. Richards back, because he was my cobbler, so I jumped out from the stump where I was sheltering and



threw a few grenades over into the position where the Japanese were dug in. I did not kill them all, so I went back, got a Bren gun and emptied the magazine into the post. That settled the Japanese.

"Another position opened up when I went on to get Cpl. Richards, but we got a bit of covering fire and I brought him back to our lines. I also helped the section to bring back the other two."

### **Markham Point.**

Over the river from Heath's Plantation is Markham Point, a high piece of ground commanding the surrounding countryside, which had been heavily pillboxed and revetted by the Japanese. For months it had been held as an outpost, and for the few weeks preceding the attack on Lae the enemy garrison had been steadily harassed by our patrols.

Several different patrol formations had sniped on it and probed its defences. For the 200 Japanese in residence it was a nasty spot indeed on those early days in September.

So isolated was their position that it was the opinion of the Australian command that they might evacuate, cross the river, and link with the strong forces at Heath's or one of the other plantations.

The order, therefore, went out to "Wampit Force," the formation then engaged in harassing Markham Point, to engage and destroy the garrison. In the event of that being impossible, they were to hold the enemy and prevent him from crossing the river in time to join up with those other Japanese who were awaiting death in Heath's Plantation.

The enemy had been many months in the preparation of Markham Point, and had built an elaborate system of trenches and fire lanes. These defences frustrated the first Australian assault, although the enemy was caught off guard, and the first gallant frontal rush carried the Australians to their objective. The aroused enemy, however, was able, by using his elaborate trench system, to cut off the forward party and to pin down the supports with heavy machine-gun fire. Two platoon commanders and ten of their men were killed in this attack.

The enemy clung to his perch high up on Markham Point. Day and night he was pounded from below by mortars and machine-guns. One night, when the Jap. did not answer, patrols climbed up on hands and knees, delousing traps as they went. They found the enemy had cleared out. He did not join his fellows at Heath's—or at Lae—but was caught up by Australians moving up the coast in pursuit of the Japanese remnants which had fled from Salamaua.



**O**n the Huon Peninsula, 9th Division, up against much stiffer opposition still, was racing toward Lae.

Once across the Busu, the bridgehead firmly established and well protected, the 24th Brigade advance was split into two columns. The 2/28th Battalion continued along the coast and the 2/43rd Battalion moved toward the Yanga area, which was north-west from the Busu bridgehead toward the Malahang air strip.

Enemy were contacted by each of these drives, but on all occasions the Japanese retired and was not inclined to fight spiritedly. His resistance was now little more than token. Of these half-dozen or so clashes, two of the stiffest were in Yanga village and the Malahang Anchorage area.

The 2/17th Battalion, which, until this time, had had an artillery protection role on the Burep River following its initial role as spearhead of the advance, crossed the Busu at its mouth to relieve the 2/32nd Battalion guarding the bridgehead. Forward artillery gave strong support to the infantry attacks and carried out effective reconnaissance shoots. The targets for the guns now included Lae and the surrounding districts. In every case their fire softened obstacles for the infantry advance, a case in point being their concentration on New Yanga before the effective attack by the 2/43rd Battalion.

The success of the double-pronged drive of the 24th Brigade was exemplified by the continued swift pace of the coastal drive. Malahang Anchorage was secured, and the road leading north to Malahang air field was cut by these two prongs on September 14. Among the equipment captured from the enemy at the Anchorage were three pieces of medium artillery that had been little used.

Meanwhile, the 26th Brigade troops were still being held up and wracked by enemy fire where they were trying to cross the turbulent Busu about five miles inland. An assault bridge, flung across by the engineers under fire, had been washed away, and two great lengths of timber, dragged from the jungle, had met a similar fate. They had been held up at the crossing for six days now—every conceivable means of reaching the western bank had been tried and had failed.

Back along the track through the jungle to the Burep River—the track that had been hacked by the advancing troops on September 8—the engineers and pioneers were overcoming terrific difficulties to build a corduroy road. Coupled with the engineering problems were the difficulties of supply. At no stage was it possible to bring ammunition and rations on wheels to the forward troops, and an almost complete absence of native labour meant that a proportion of the troops normally available for fighting was always engaged in the essential work of supply.

### **Across at Last !**

Late in the afternoon of September 14 a footbridge was constructed to join the central island of the river with the eastern bank, and five platoons were moved across. Finally, another bridge placed by the engineers held, and that night, under cover of darkness, the brigade crossed.

The crossing from the eastern bank to the island, covered with kunai, could not be made with any certainty until the enemy machine gun nests high on the western bank had been silenced. That one heavy machine gun and its support of four medium machine guns had contained any movement on, to or from the island with murderous enfilading fire. The enemy was well dug in, and his strongly-wooded pillboxes were something that these troops had not encountered before.

The Japanese machine guns had to be silenced, and it fell to the lot of a machine gun crew from the 2/48th Battalion to do the job. For a half-hour this crew snuggled into their kunai-covered sand-holes on that central island, exchanging burst for burst with the enemy. Their ultimate success in that duel decided the issue, and when the enemy posts had been wiped out, the 26th Brigade crossed in force. A later inspection of the enemy pits showed that our machine gunners had been deadly accurate.

Once across the river the 26th Brigade swung into its stride and rapidly advanced southwest toward Lae. The pincer movement that had begun with the two front brigades—the 24th and the 26th—on September 9 was revived. Malahang air strip—overgrown with grass—taken by the 2/48th Battalion from the north and the 2/15th Battalion, was in our hands by nightfall on September 15.

After the success at the Malahang air strip came the occupation of Wagan and the Malahang Mission by the 24th Brigade, now

advancing on a three-battalion front. At the Butibum River the two brigades joined up for the final assault on Lae.

The men were fatigued, a few were limping, but their morale was never higher. It had always been an essential part of the command's programme to advance with all possible speed to minimise the final resistance. The advance had been fast, but it had been limited. It ceased each nightfall to allow rest for the troops. In most cases night activity had been confined to standing patrols.

### **The Final Push.**

Meanwhile, the 7th Division was sweeping down to Lae astide the Markham Road. From Heath's the enemy had retired into Edward's Plantation, and here, on September 15, the decisive phase of the Lower Markham campaign was fought.

The territory which it covered extended from the foothills of the Atzera mountains on the left flank, across the road through the plantations and intervening jungle, to the left bank of the Markham on the other flank. The distance between the outlying patrols on either flank varied between two and four miles.

Up to this stage, the 25th Brigade's operations had, in the main, been directed at seizing and developing the high ground at the base of the mountains. The enemy did not attempt to use the low ground very much, but was going for the higher ground in an endeavour to escape westward. The Australians, however, went higher, outflanking and getting behind him.

Sometimes the advance took the form of three spearheads; at other times one battalion merged with the others to a common task. The 2/33rd operated mostly on the left flank, the 2/25th on the road and the centre and the 2/2nd Pioneers on the river. The 2/31st did an excellent job in a relieving role.

At Heath's and beyond, the tempo quickened. Enemy resistance was stiffer, and there were lively duels between our 25-pounders and the Japanese artillery.

After 2/25th Battalion's success at Heath's, 2/33rd Battalion attacked and eliminated a pocket at Lane's Bridge, while a company of the Pioneers, moving in from the South, had cut one line of the enemy's withdrawal.

In the morning of September 15, the 2/33rd met the enemy at Edward's Plantation on a front extending from the track into the foothills of the Atzera Mountains. By early afternoon this front had the shape of a half crescent around the Japanese positions to the north and west. The 2/31st Battalion, using the southern side of the track for the first time during the whole advance, pushed around the enemy's rear and linked up with the 2/33rd positions to the north. The enemy was now completely surrounded, and by 10 a.m. next day the encircled Japanese force had been completely annihilated.

The Japanese—marines—fought bitterly to the end.

## Japanese Flight.

Salamaua had fallen to 5th Australian Division on September 11.

In the following days evidence accumulated that, realising now he had been trapped by the Australian programme, the enemy decided to endeavour to evacuate the survivors of the Lae garrison.

With the remnants of his Salamaua force fleeing up the coast, pursued by 5th Division, and escape cut off by sea, up the Markham and along the Huon shores, the enemy attempted to get his men across the mountains north of Lae.

Reports of his exodus along little known native pads towards the Rawlinson Ridge had been accumulating at 9th Division Headquarters since the fall of Salamaua.

Parties of troops, carrying supplies and equipment, had been seen by Papuan Infantry Battalion patrols deep in the hills, and occasionally other batches were reported by the low-flying Boomerangs and Wirraways, the Royal Australian Air Force planes that did a magnificent job spotting for the artillery.

Apparently Lieut.-General Nakano, who commanded at Lae, cleared out some time before the main body of his troops. First reports of the Japanese moving out reached 7th Division on September 15.

Both 7th and 9th Divisions acted in attempts to cut off the retreat, while recognising that many of the enemy were unlikely to survive the rigours of the mountain trails, and that starvation would claim numbers of them.

Hurriedly sent out from Nadzab, American paratroopers contacted evacuating Japanese in the Bumbu River area on the afternoon of September 15, and reported that they had killed 40 and wounded 20. The paratroopers lost contact during the night, and later met only small groups.

Other reports indicated that parties of Japanese had passed through the area earlier in the day.

Bombing and strafing were carried out in the general Bumbu area, and the 2/14th Battalion was sent to Boana to close that possible line of retirement. The 2/16th Battalion relieved the paratroopers in the Bumbu area, while the 2/6th Independent Company covered the Sangan area. Only odd stragglers were seen—and killed.

On the 9th Division side, the 2/24th Battalion swung north toward the areas of Musom and Gawan, north of Kunda Bridge, but did not contact the enemy.

**L**ae was occupied by troops of the 7th Division in the morning of September 16.

While the action around Edwards' was being fought, the 2/25th Battalion pushed along the track as far as Jacobsen's on the outskirts of Lae's defences, but met no opposition there. The 2/31st Battalion then moved down and took Lae from the north.

But 9th Division was also waiting, and had arranged for Fifth Air Force to make a heavy air attack as the prelude to their final thrust, 9th Division troops waiting impatiently on the eastern bank of the Butibum River.

Patrols entered Lae at 11 a.m., after killing 70 Japanese, but the air strike delayed the actual occupation by 7th Division, and caused the commander of the 25th Brigade to signal :—" Forward troops at outskirts of Lae. I am prevented from entering it by the Fifth American Air Force."

First occupation was temporary. Unaware of the rapidity of 7th Division's advance, and implementing a programme of softening up, 9th Division artillery began to shell Lae at 12.30 p.m., but shelling ceased in response to a signal from 7th Division, troops of which re-entered what was left of the town.

On the 9th Division side, the 24th and 26th Brigades swept across the Butibum and raced into Lae as soon as the last shell fell.

Seventh Division troops who first entered Lae found that the enemy had fled, leaving only a few men to man strong points, which were quickly overcome. He had left, too, tremendous booty— great stacks of bombs, trucks, motor-cycles, equipment— and an appalling smell, for the Japanese had neglected elementary principles of field hygiene.



DUMP AREA

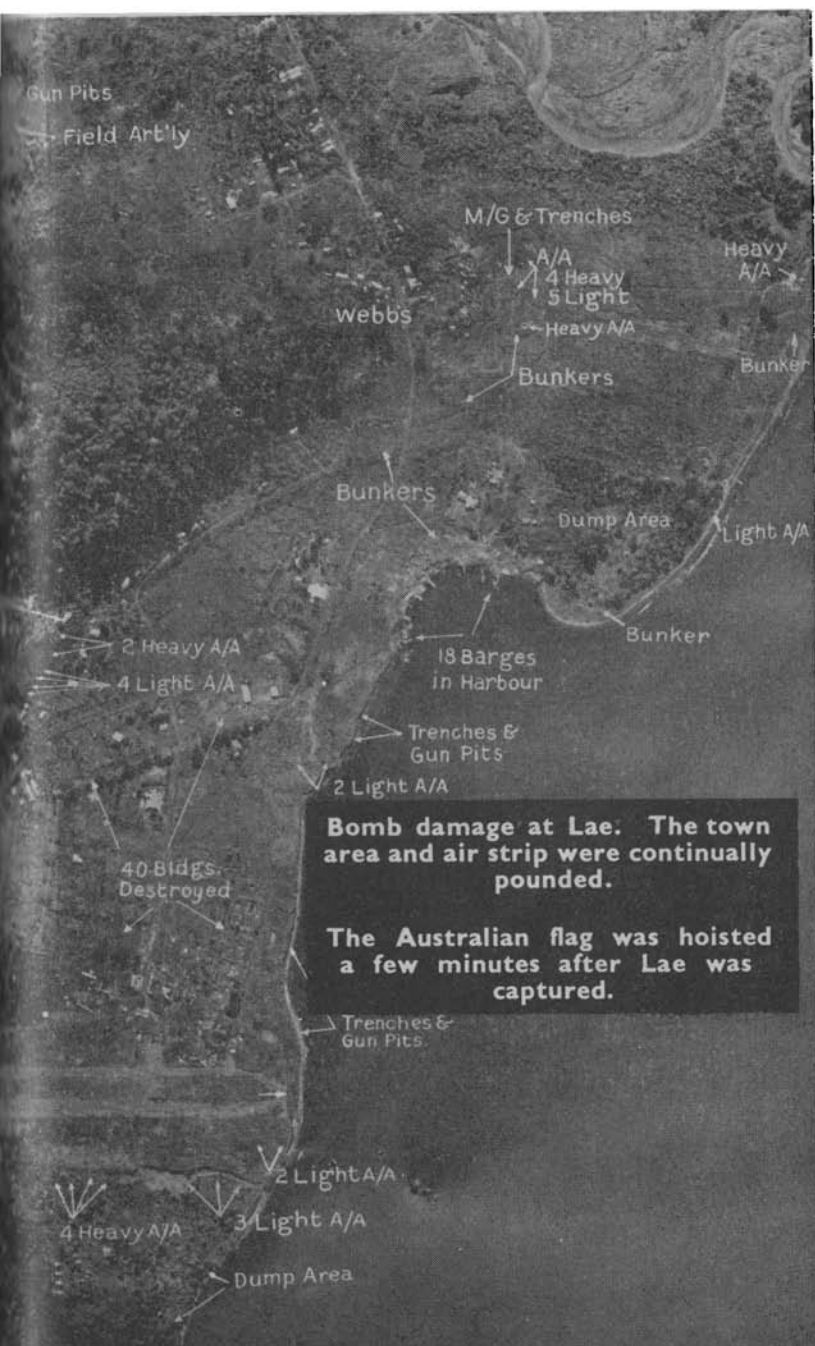
UNDERGROUND  
STORAGE

2 M/A 2 Light A/A

4 Heavy A/A

Bridge

4000



**Bomb damage at Lae. The town area and air strip were continually pounded.**

**The Australian flag was hoisted a few minutes after Lae was captured.**

Aerial bombardment had reduced the few buildings into heaps of rubble and sticks. Huge craters dotted the area. Trees had been scarred and their tops lopped off. The Terrace presented a picture of muddy shell holes, broken trees, desolation.

Two medium cargo ships lay offshore, and at the mouth of the Butibum River were the mangled, rusted hulks of at least a dozen barges and launches.

On Lae air field were the remains of planes of all types—bombers, transports, reconnaissance planes, Zeros and Zekes. The surrounding revetments on the strip had been beautifully pattern-bombed. Craters pocked the earth practically every yard.

Down on the beach there were plane engines still in the crates. Altogether the haul of Japanese aerial equipment was the biggest that had fallen into Allied hands.

Hangars and machine shops were gutted skeletons of twisted and rusted iron. Some of the captured trucks, most of them Japanese manufacture, were quickly put into operation by the conquering Australians, but the majority were beyond repair. A number of guns were captured, but in most cases the enemy had removed the breech blocks and other vital parts before abandoning them.

Fortifications that had survived were mostly of the improvised bunker type, constructed of coconut logs or petrol drums filled with earth, similar to those defences which the Japanese had built at Buna and Gona.

There was little evidence of the pleasant little township that was Lae before the war. Bungalows were ruined shambles, while the luxuriant growth of the tropics had overrun the gardens. Here and there familiar garden flowers were thrusting their way through the dense green undergrowth.

Over all there was a musty smell from bales of rice which had burst open and which were fermenting and grilling in the sun. But the smell and the desolate scene did not deter the hundreds of naked troops washing and bathing in the sea after their strenuous labours of the preceding 13 days. The fighting was over for a time. The only shots to be heard came from hand grenades as men attempted to stun the fish swimming near the shore. Fried fish was a tempting dish after the monotony of bully beef and biscuits.

Up on the Terrace, on a rudely constructed flagpole, the commander of the 25th Brigade broke out the Australian flag.

Down on the flat, men of the 2/31st Battalion (7 Division) talked with men of the 2/32nd Battalion (9 Division). It was the first time the two battalions had met on a battlefield, since the 2/32nd Battalion was sent from the 25th Brigade at Mersa Matruh, Egypt, to join the 24th Brigade in Tobruk. That was in April, 1941. The 2/31st Battalion remained with the 25th Brigade and fought with the 7th Division in Syria and Papua.





Former Jap. Headquarters at Lae.

In their rapid drive down from Nadzab, 25th Brigade had killed at least 500 Japanese. Their own losses were two officers and 39 other ranks killed, and six officers and 83 other ranks wounded.

#### **Aftermath of Battle.**

Three days saw a great change in Lae.

The task of clearing up the debris, burying the enemy dead, and getting rid of the filth that permeated everything was well under way. Big bonfires were burning everywhere. Popping of exploding ammunition in fires might have given the casual observer the impression that fighting was still in progress, but it was just a matter of burning ammunition with everything else.

A visit to the Lutheran Church at Malahang Mission revealed that it was very little damaged, although the enemy, who had used it as a hospital, had stripped it of all interior fittings. It was filled to overflowing by medical equipment most of it of excellent quality and including complete sets of surgical instruments. The little mission schoolhouse just across the road was also little damaged.

The Japanese had used it to accommodate the medical staff and a deep air raid shelter had been dug immediately under the earth floor.

In the township the Australians were wandering round as happy as schoolboys wearing Japanese sailor hats, straw sunhelmets and batik sarongs.

It was evident from captured albums that some of the Japanese garrison had spent some time in Singapore, for many of the albums contained photographs showing scenes in Singapore after the Japanese occupation.

The most distasteful thing to the Australian soldiers clearing up the mess that was Lae was the filthy conditions that the Japanese had tolerated. It was evident that the Japanese thought nothing of fouling his living quarters, his shelters and his trenches.

It was not long before Allied transport planes were landing on the Lae strip. In a week Lae was changed from a cesspool into an habitable town once again. It was another base, an important base, for future operations that were to strike at the Japanese in the Ramu Valley, the Finisterre Ranges, and up the Huon Peninsula and from there on to Madang.

But before that change was effected, the 7th Division had retraced its steps to Nadzab to carry the campaign up the Markham and Ramu Valleys, and the 9th Division had gone on another amphibious operation to capture Finschhafen and ultimately, with 5th Division Troops, to clear the entire Huon Peninsula and to make possible the U.S. operations against New Britain.

By no means the least of the reasons for the success of this, the first Australian Combined Operation was the assistance and support of our American Allies, the parachutists, the men on the landing craft, the engineers and ack-ack gunners and finally the American airmen.

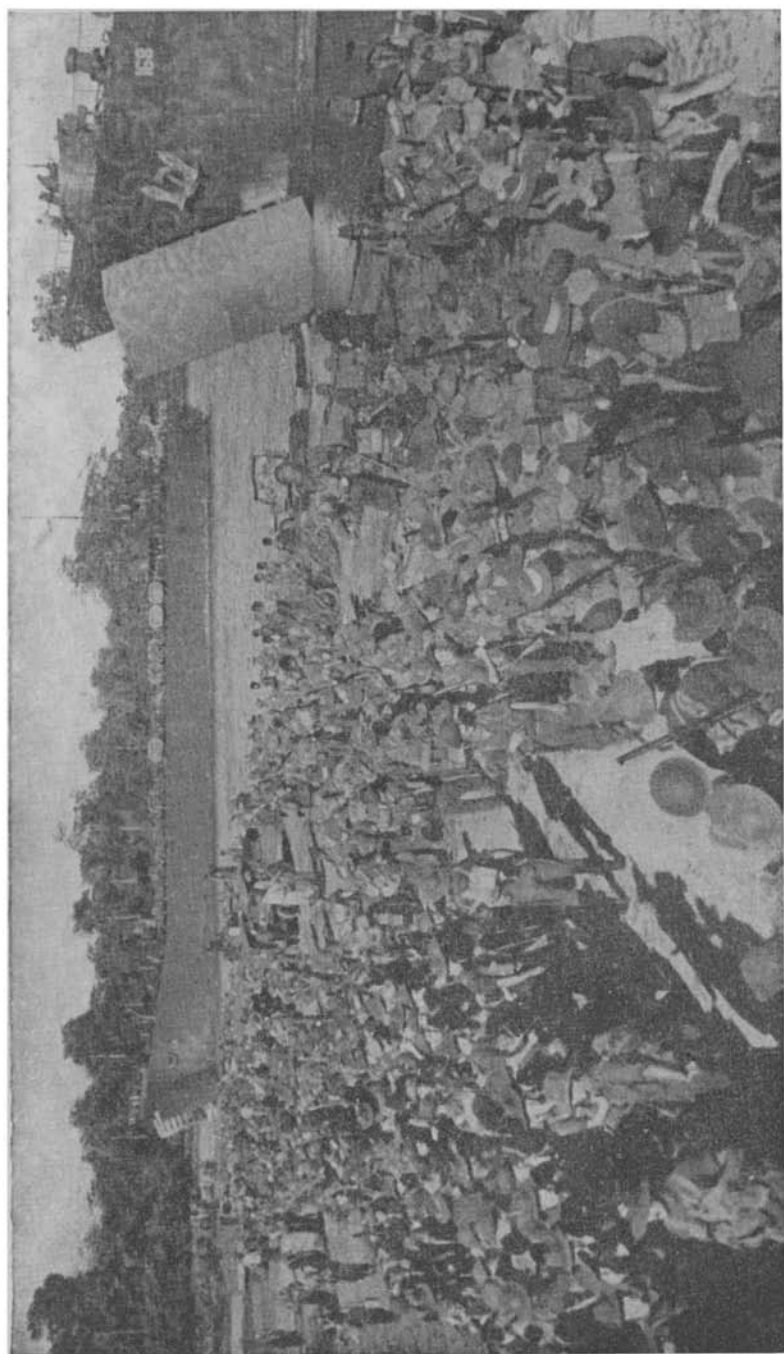
# HUON PENINSULA

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FINSCHHAFEN  
SATELBERG  
SIO

*September 22nd, 1943 —  
January 14th, 1944*



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## Second Assault Landing

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**I**T was the capture of Finschhafen that cleared the way for the successful Australian drive along the Huon Peninsula and for the American operations against New Britain.

And, although the initial success at Finschhafen took only 10 days and a few hours of the five months of the complete campaign, it provided some of the bloodiest fighting of this war—and that in some of the worst country our troops have encountered.

The story of Finschhafen is a story of the grim determination of an Australian brigade group against a larger enemy force. It is the story of the highest courage in a situation in which the odds were against the Australians all the way.

Contained in a narrow coastal belt that was open to attack from any point on land and sea, the Australians continued to move steadily toward their objective—Finschhafen, the capture of which was the prelude to the expulsion of the enemy from the entire peninsula.

The first of the two phases of the Finschhafen campaign resulted in the capture of Finschhafen proper and the control of the beach from the Song River, in the north, to the south of Langemak Bay. That success gave us the vital base which was the main objective of the assault.

Formerly the site of a German mission, Finschhafen has a good anchorage and was used by the Japanese as a barge-staging point in his movement into the Huon Gulf and Lae.

We had to seize and hold it because of the projected Allied landings in New Britain. It was the closest point on the Huon Peninsula to New Britain, and was, therefore, an excellent jumping off place for any subsequent assault on New Britain. It also gave control of Vitiaz Strait, and the more open water to the north.

It was obvious after the initial success, however, that this base could not be regarded as secure until the enemy had been cleared from the dominating land features to the north-west and north of Finschhafen. Satelberg, a mission station in the hills, roughly five miles airline from Finschhafen, was the southern pivot of continued enemy resistance which swung north to the Song River, through Bonga on the coast, and round the coast to Sio.

Plans for the attack on Finschhafen—the second amphibious operation by 9th Australian Division troops—had been made well in advance, and were implemented immediately after the successful Lae operation.

Opinion differed as to the size of the force which should be committed. Finally one brigade group was allotted the task. The 20th Brigade, which had made the landing at Red Beach on September 4, and which was fit and experienced, was chosen.

Scarlet Beach, a 900-yard strip of coral sand immediately south of the mouth of the Song River, was selected as the point of assault. The beach was about 90 miles from Lae in enemy waters.

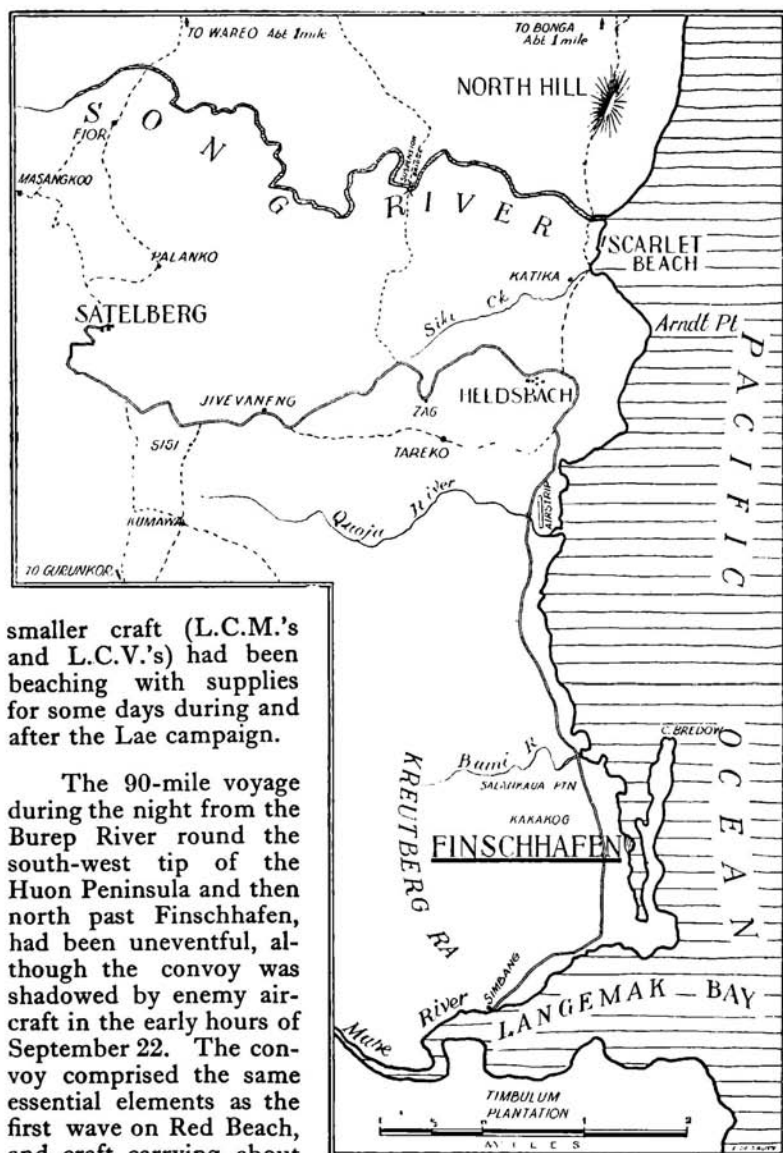
Behind the shore a coral track led directly south to Finschhafen, a little more than six miles away, commencing near Heldsbach and passing through Salankaua coconut plantation. South of the latter plantation the Kakakog area, a narrow spur between the coast and the steep foothills, was thought to be occupied by the enemy in some strength.

Wednesday, September 22, was another misty dawn. Crouched in their small, square-nosed landing craft, men of the 20th Brigade sped toward Scarlet Beach—out there in front, not visible yet in the murky blackness.

These men, who had made the assault on Red Beach less than three weeks before, had there met no opposition. Here, they did not know what lay in front of them.

### **Bombing Again.**

Enemy aircraft had been over the embarkation area the previous evening (September 21), but they had been driven off, to drop their bombs haphazardly in the sea somewhere between the mouth of the Burep River—the embarkation point—and Red Beach. The main force of bombers had been intercepted near Hopoi Mission, and Kittyhawks had shot down four bombers and five escorting fighters. More determined attacks possibly would have inflicted heavy casualties among the 5,008 troops embarking in such a small area. The concentration had been necessary because the L.S.T.'s, L.C.I.'s and A.P.D.'s—the craft made available by the United States Navy—could use only certain known beaches. The majority beached at the Burep, while two L.S.T.'s loaded auxiliary troops and stores at Red Beach. The 20th Brigade, concentrated at the Burep for embarkation, had been five miles inland on the Busu River, with components scattered between Red Beach and the mouth of the Busu, where



smaller craft (L.C.M.'s and L.C.V.'s) had been beaching with supplies for some days during and after the Lae campaign.

The 90-mile voyage during the night from the Burep River round the south-west tip of the Huon Peninsula and then north past Finschhafen, had been uneventful, although the convoy was shadowed by enemy aircraft in the early hours of September 22. The convoy comprised the same essential elements as the first wave on Red Beach, and craft carrying about 15 days' stores for the brigade group had been returned from Lae to Morobe. Those latter craft were scheduled to arrive at Scarlet Beach on the night of September 22.

As the assault troops, transferred from the A.P.D.'s to L.C.M.'s and L.C.V.'s, raced toward the shore, the pre-dawn quiet—the most lonely stillness that one could imagine—was rent by terrific explosions

The preliminary naval bombardment from the accompanying destroyers had begun. It seemed like Red Beach all over again !

### **Landing Opposed.**

But, suddenly, the enemy was awake. The pre-dawn twilight was blasted by streams of tracer bullets searing across the beach front. Red, blue, orange—they chased one another, some spurted out toward the oncoming craft. It was a kaleidoscope of death. And ever surely—too fast it seemed to those watching from the larger craft standing off shore—the small, frail assault craft rode the swell toward that danger line.

Now came the answering fire from the sea. Over the heads of the crouching troops, continuous fire was brought to bear on to a ridge approximately 30 feet above sea level and some 40 yards inland.

The L.C.I.'s gave that beach everything they had with their 20 mm guns. It did not seem possible that anything could remain alive under such a torrent of fire. But there was no slackening of that coloured dance from the shore. It seemed, when the boats got closer, that it reached crescendo.

This landing was not history repeating itself. This was history about to be made.

Some of the smaller craft, which had been instructed to land at a definite location, veered off, and, in the darkness, some sub-units were landed far from their appointed places. Some L.C.I.'s struck a sandbank some yards off shore, and failed to beach at their first attempt. Under heavy enemy fire, casualties were sustained among our troops. Some troops were landed in deep water and had to swim over the coral on which the craft had grounded. For them it was a matter of get to the shore as best they could.

The third wave, consisting of reserve rifle companies, battalion headquarters and supporting arms, including the Papuan Infantry Battalion section, and 20th Brigade Headquarters, became the actual assaulting troops on Scarlet Beach. The way had not been paved for them by the two preceding waves. They had landed, in the main, on Siki Cove, beyond the southern point of Scarlet Beach, and on Arndt Point headland, some thousand yards south from Scarlet Beach.

Wave three attacked strongly until the arrival on Scarlet Beach of the assault troops from Siki Cove. Then, together, they routed the enemy. It was bayonet-point fighting in many instances—bayonet-point fighting, courage, and grim determination to make that beach no matter what the cost.

It was a classic example of comradeship and discipline.

### **George Medal Award.**

Many heroic acts were performed in those first few minutes on the beach. While they are too numerous to categorise, the story



of the native P.I.B. is worth recording. It is told in the citation which accompanied the award of the George Medal to Sergeant Iaking Iwagu, Royal Papuan Constabulary.

"During operations against Finschhafen," the citation states, "the enemy were holding the bush near the edge of the beach and landing parties were under heavy fire. The craft in which the company commander and Iwagu were being conveyed failed to reach the beach and the ramps were lowered in twelve feet of water. The company commander jumped into the water in an attempt to swim ashore and was followed immediately by Iwagu. The officer was seriously wounded while in the water. Iwagu, seeing him sink, went to his aid and, although under heavy fire, succeeded in bringing the wounded officer ashore and stayed with him on the beach until the arrival of stretcher-bearers. Unfortunately, the officer died the same day. Iwagu, in this incident, displayed outstanding courage and devotion to duty, and, during later bombings, his coolness and calm bearing imparted confidence to the other native troops."

### **The Jap. was Prepared.**

A later inspection of the beach showed that the enemy's defences included ten strongly-constructed and well-camouflaged bunkers. These defences had been hurriedly, but solidly, made. The engineers reported that the field works were not more than 48 hours old, and it was estimated later that the landing had been opposed by a force strongly entrenched in the bunkers, pillboxes and other types of field works.

More opposition was to follow. The enemy's frantic attempt to deny us the beach had solid backing—a fact we were not long in learning.

Shortly after dawn the beach and the immediate fringe of the undergrowth had been cleared of the enemy, and the battalions, still slightly disorganised after the mix-up at the landing, were pushing toward their first objective. Brigade Headquarters was established at 6.10 a.m. with the headquarters of the 2/17th Battalion about 60 yards inland from the south of the beach. The 2/15th Battalion was assembling in the vicinity of Katika village, from which the enemy had retreated to prepared positions westward astride the track.

The 2/13th Battalion, less "A" and "C" Companies, was moving up Siki creek against slight opposition. "C" Company, which had landed at Arndt Point, was moving along the coastal track toward Launch Jetty, 2,000 yards from their landing point and south of Heldsbach Plantation.

Not long after the landing began, aircraft appeared over the convoy sitting on the beach, and were engaged by the escorting destroyers. The Jap. was showing his fangs—not the false teeth he had displayed at Lae.

At 8 a.m. the 2/13th Battalion reported that everything was proceeding according to plan, with one company directed on Zag,

a point on the Satelberg road south-east of Katika, and two companies moving toward Heldsbach Plantation. Meanwhile, the 2/17th Battalion had passed one company and two platoons of the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion across the Song river to North Hill. That hill was our right flank in the beach landing and was later to become our rearguard against possible enemy attack from Bonga to the north. The Papuan infantry patrols were moving toward Bonga.

At 9 a.m. all companies of the 2/17th Battalion were on their first objectives, with the exception of "A" Company, which had struck an enemy post on the inland track running west from Katika. Two companies of the 2/13th Battalion had passed through Heldsbach Plantation, meeting only slight opposition, and the 2/15th Battalion had concentrated its strength south of Katika.

Enemy bombers again attacked the beach area at 9.30 a.m., and one was shot down by our intercepting fighters. The L.S.T.'s, which had been beached at 7.25 a.m. without incident, had been unloaded by this time, but they did not suffer any damage from the bombing raid. Casualties within the beachhead were light.

### **Beachhead Firm.**

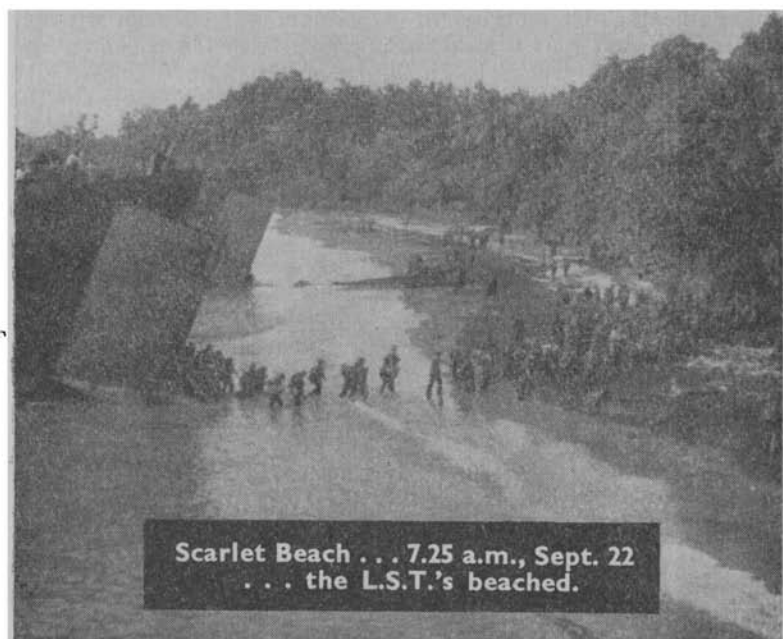
Despite the bombing raid and the opposition encountered at the landing, everything was going smoothly when the enemy was encountered about 10 a.m. in strong positions astride the track west of Katika. The command ordered no further exploitation until the beachhead position had become more stabilised and all enemy stragglers mopped up. "A" Company of the 2/17th Battalion, which had been probing along that track, was withdrawn and moved to another position west of the beachhead. The 2/13th Battalion was ordered to capture the enemy post on the track.

The clearing of those enemy positions was completed shortly after noon, and a company of the 2/15th Battalion was sent in to mop up, in place of "D" Company of the 2/13th Battalion.

The enemy continued to give trouble in the general Katika area, behind the troops who had gone through Heldsbach Plantation. After heavy concentrations of mortar fire the enemy, threatened with complete encirclement, withdrew. The Katika area was then occupied by the 2/15th Battalion.

Reports from the Papuan Infantry Battalion, which had moved round North Hill, stated that there were only small scattered detachments of the enemy in the Bonga area.

With the beachhead firmly established at 4.30 p.m., it appeared that the day's work had been done. All scattered pockets of enemy resistance had been mopped up; the 2/17th Battalion was in position to protect the beachhead; and the 2/13th Battalion, which had continued to drive swiftly southward while the Katika incident flared and died, had one company at Launch Jetty, another company at Heldsbach, and two companies in reserve in the vicinity of the artillery positions on the high ground south of Siki creek.



Scarlet Beach . . . 7.25 a.m., Sept. 22  
. . . the L.S.T.'s beached.

### **Stores In—Wounded Out.**

That first night—September 22—the second flight of L.S.T.'s carrying stores and more heavy equipment from Morobe, arrived at Red Beach and were gone again by 2 a.m. the next day. Unfortunately, they carried with them some stores that were not unloaded within the time permitted the craft to stay on the beach, but all wounded capable of being evacuated were sent out.

"Biscuit bombers" came over Brigade Headquarters during the early evening of the first day and dropped 9 mm. ammunition. Dropping at night without flares and with the "target" just a small patch of kunai grass in the dense jungle has its hazards and thrills, and, in this instance, all the thrills were had by the troops on the ground. The dropping, however, was quite successful, and 90 per cent. of the ammunition dropped was recovered.

Located round the beachhead perimeter, a small spot of Australian territory which yesterday was Japanese-held, and which was still situated in enemy ground, the Australian troops were isolated from the world. Their Divisional comrades were way down along the coast in the comparative safety and comfort of Lae. Here, they were a sore spot in the Japanese hide. It was left to the morrow to see what plans he had for the future, for ridding himself of this pest—the Australian soldier.

A readjustment of the beachhead perimeter and a probing toward Satelberg while still advancing toward Finschhafen, was the programme for the morning of September 23. Papuan infantry patrols were sent west toward Satelberg early in the morning, and re-arrangements were made by all three battalions. The 2/17th Battalion disposed its companies in positions more suitable for the defence of the beachhead. It moved one company to Zag—the army-created locality—to relieve “A” Company of the 2/13th Battalion; and the 2/15th Battalion moved through the main body of the 2/13th Battalion to take up the advance toward Finschhafen, with the Bumi river as its first objective. A standing patrol from Zag south to Tareko—on the high ground west of Heldsbach Plantation—was established by the 2/17th Battalion.

Moving rapidly and picketing tracks leading from the main track to the high ground on its right, the 2/15th Battalion made no contact with the enemy during the morning. Small enemy pockets were cleared from Kamloa village, just north of the Bumi river, in that rapid advance.

And, about 1.20 p.m., the enemy was contacted—firmly entrenched in heavy bunkers across the river.

Leaving sufficient force to hold the enemy at the mouth of the Bumi river, the 2/15th Battalion swung two companies west of the main road into the jungle. With machetes, knives, bayonets and tomahawks, the troops hacked their way through the closely-knit jungle and, marching for the most part on a compass course, those two companies were by last light in position to establish an observation post to further a projected bridgehead across the Bumi river, 1,500 yards inland. The force left at the mouth of the Bumi established another observation post for artillery and mortars at Kamloa Point. That post remained there throughout the operation until Salankaua Point had been evacuated by the enemy.

The 2/13th Battalion, which had been relieved by the 2/15th Battalion as the van of the advance, moved in the wake of the ever-forward drive, and dropped one company off at the Finschhafen airstrip (unservicable as it was overgrown with grass) to protect the guns which had been moved forward. Our forces were moving up to come to grips with the enemy at the mouth of the Bumi.

### **Jap. Hits Back Again.**

In the late afternoon the enemy, using 70 mm. infantry guns emplaced in the general Kakakog area, shelled our positions at the mouth of the Bumi river, and his bombers hit ammunition dumps in the Scarlet Beach area. No casualties resulted from the bombing raid, but the Jap. was showing that he would contest every inch of the way.

The night was quiet, except for considerable and continuous barge movement. The droning of the barge engines was similar to the sound of aircraft, and everyone was on his toes. There was no

knowing what the Jap. was about. His barge movement might have meant anything—and we knew that we were vulnerable to sea attack.

Heavy rain that night increased the 2/15th Battalion's difficulties in the reconnaissance of the Bumi for a crossing at the 1500-yard mark. Strong enemy posts behind light barbed-wire were encountered on the southern bank of the river and the battalion suffered casualties.

Inclement weather also interfered with air operations. Our aircraft was prevented from striking at Salankaua Plantation and Kakakog, but within half an hour of noon a particularly heavy air attack by the enemy on gun positions in the general Finschhafen airstrip area resulted in severe casualties, mainly among engineer personnel and the 5th U.S. Air Force details attached to the command.

But we were biting back, too. All the afternoon harassing fire by artillery and mortars was maintained on the enemy positions south of the Bumi river mouth and toward Kedam Point.

That day—September 24—the 2/15th Battalion attacked across the Bumi river in the face of enemy opposition behind barbed-wire on the opposite bank. One company got across the deep stream, and by 2.15 p.m. was established on the lower slopes. The enemy suffered casualties—so did we.

But, we were across. Within the hour, the 2/13th Battalion had begun passing troops across the stream, despite constant harassing by machine gun enfilading fire along the river from the east and the west.

By last light four platoons of the 2/13th Battalion had been passed across the river and had made contact with the company of the 2/15th Battalion holding the slender bridgehead on the southern bank.

At this stage great difficulty was being experienced in getting ammunition and supplies forward. All troops in the area were needed for fighting or protecting the beachhead, but the risk had to be taken if the men were to be fed and equipped. Accordingly, a platoon of the 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion was shifted forward from the Scarlet Beach area to provide some relief. The men had been on beachhead protection duties, but the necessity of maintaining supply was of paramount importance at this stage.

### **Our Bombers Appear.**

There were five enemy bomb raids on Scarlet Beach and the gun areas up to 7.30 a.m. on September 25, and, although little damage was done, severe casualties were sustained by ack-ack crews and other troops within the beachhead. The Jap. raids were becoming monotonous.

Our first air strike in support of the operation was launched by dive bombers concentrating on Salankaua Plantation and Kedam Point a few minutes after 10 a.m. on September 25. The effect on the enemy positions, and more particularly on the morale of our troops, was considerable. Those who had a grandstand view of the raid cheered the planes as they made dive after dive.

But the enemy had another worry for us. His troops in the Satelberg area were becoming more aggressive.

We had other worries of our own. The supply position to the forward troops across the Bumi and the evacuation of wounded became serious. Every effort had to be made to find a jeepable route from the main south road to the foothills of the ridge on which the 2/15th Battalion had established its observation post two days previously. Engineers and the pioneer platoon of the 2/15th Battalion finally opened up the route after much back-breaking toil, and the supply position was relieved. With our troops remaining almost static, supplies of all descriptions were pushed forward so that further troops could be passed through the bridgehead to the foothills of the Kreutberg Range.

That night the enemy trumped his previous surprises. During the evening a landing craft approached the shore near the disused airstrip, but it is not known whether any raiding party was landed. As a precautionary measure, one company of the 2/17th Battalion was rushed to protect the guns at the strip, for it was surmised that they would be the objective of any raiding party. The guns had pounded the enemy mercilessly, day and night, and while there could be no estimate of the enemy's casualties by our shelling, his continued and concentrated air raids indicated that our artillery had him worried. His air attacks were the only reply he had made to our artillery up to that time. He had ineffectually shelled our positions at the mouth of the Bumi on September 23, but, as at Lae, there had been no attempt on his part to engage in counter-battery warfare.

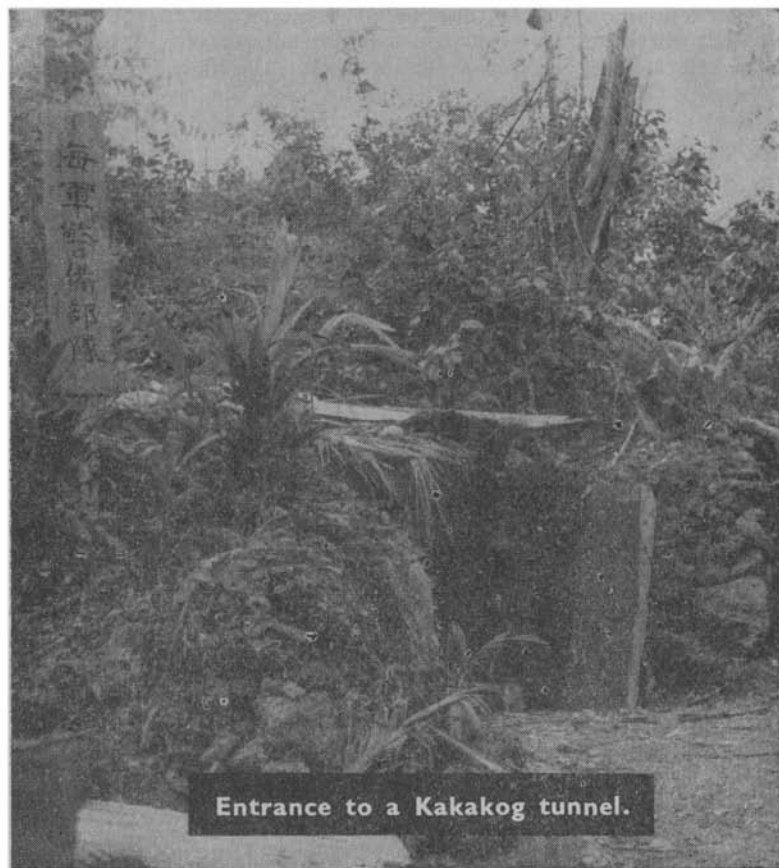
The disturbing barge traffic continued throughout that night—September 25—and, because one craft had already attempted a landing, a careful watch was kept along the coast.

Dawn of September 26 was heralded with two more air raids upon the gun positions.

### **Satelberg Rising—And Signal Victory.**

Increased enemy activity down the Song river and toward Katika and Tareko—all presumably emanating from the Satelberg area—confirmed suspicions of the vulnerability of our beachhead. Our supply line had been drawn out to approximately 5 miles, and the going, even along the coral-based north-south track, which looked so firm that first day, was becoming increasingly difficult because of rain and the traffic. The jungle hung close at every point of the track and the surface was given no chance to dry out.

In the morning of Monday, September 26, fighting patrols from two companies covering the beachhead located enemy posts, estim-



Entrance to a Kakakog tunnel.

ated at platoon strengths, directly west of the centre of Scarlet Beach. Artillery fire was brought to bear on the posts and on the suspected line of approach to them. That action seemed to take care of the particular situation, and the drive on Finschhafen was continued.

By 12.30 p.m., the 2/13th Battalion had three companies over the Bumi river. One company was in contact with the enemy astride a knife-edge ridge below the highest ground of the Kreutberg Range. While the 2/13th Battalion's advance across the river had proceeded, the 2/15th Battalion had been attempting to pass one company across the river near an M.T. ford lower down. That attempted crossing point was roughly half-way between the original crossing and the mouth, where a force from the 2/15th Battalion was keeping the enemy in check.

Slowly the net was closing.



In a bold drive—at the time it may have been regarded as suicidal, but history has made it a battle honour—the 2/15th Battalion attacked up precipitous slopes to gain the high ground above Kakakog. There was barely a foothold on the river's southern bank to which the troops had crossed; above them were cliffs and tangled jungle.

### **“Suicidal” Charge.**

The troops grasped footholds where they could and hauled themselves, hand over hand, up the steep, slippery faces. It was not uncommon for a man to hold on with one hand, and fire his Owen gun or hurl grenades with the other. Each foothold grasped in the growth had to be secured while the next step was hacked by machete, bayonet, or tomahawk. It was jungle warfare the grim, hard way.

There were few native pads in the dense jungle, and those few were covered by enemy strong-posts. He had dug his foxholes cunningly and covered every approach up the cliff-face.

The top of the ridge was strongly defended by marines—the Japanese crack troops: and, although comparatively few, their positions gave them an advantage comparable with a force five times their number. Heavy machine guns, placed in sandbagged pits, complemented their advantage.

Coming up and over, under a hail of fire from a wide variety of weapons, our troops yelled as they stormed the Japanese gun positions. Within a few minutes they had routed the enemy, killing 50 before the Jap. panicked and fled. He had no time to depress his heavy guns to fire on our troops, and those guns were among the much valuable equipment captured.

Our casualties were light—it was phenomenal that they should be so light—and the successful attack placed two companies on the high ground dominating Salankaua Plantation. The position afforded excellent observation, and it was not long after the enemy had fled that our artillery officers were posted in the captured 13 machine-gun posts to direct supporting fire for the subsequent and final attacks on Finschhafen.

Down on the coast it had been a comparatively quiet afternoon. The only disturbance was caused by the enemy switching his 70 mm. infantry guns to show some interest in the supply route to our forward battalions.

Next day one platoon of the 2/15th Battalion relieved the company of the 2/13th Battalion in the O.P. (observation post) area north of the Bumi, and the reserve company of the 2/15th Battalion was moved to the general area of the M.T. ford. The 2/17th Battalion less the two companies which were engaged in other duties, was placed further forward as a support to the one company of the 2/15th Battalion, which in its turn was a “stopper” to the enemy at the mouth of the Bumi.



Demonstrations by our troops during the morning at the mouth of the Bumi provoked vigorous retaliation, including mortar, machine-gun, and 70 mm. fire. And, in our rear, enemy patrol activity was intensified.

It was obvious by this time that an enemy force was concentrating in the Satelberg area. Signal wires to the 2/17th's company at Jivevaneng—half-way between Satelberg and Heldsbach—were being cut. Lines to the platoon at Zag were being treated similarly, and Papuan infantry patrols towards Bonga reported increasing enemy traffic in that area.

Personnel left out of battle were organised into a defence force and placed in the Katika area. With only two companies available to cover tracks into the beachhead area—in reality an impossible task—and the remainder of the brigade forward some five miles, the threat to our lines of communication had become very real.

We had to do something more to ensure that our rear was protected, that our lifeline to Scarlet Beach was kept intact—our life line to the outside world, for that matter.

The Brigade Command advised Divisional Headquarters—some 90 miles away on the Burep river—that an additional battalion was required for the final thrust against Finschhafen. It was reasoned that the whole of the initial brigade group would be required in the final attack, and that other troops would be needed to hold the approaches to Scarlet Beach. The unrest in the Satelberg and Bonga areas was much too persistent to be disregarded. An enemy attack was being organised to cut our force at Heldsbach, and annihilate those troops round Scarlet Beach.

But, whatever uneasiness we may have felt because of the position at our rear, the operation "up front" was running smoothly.

### **Another Damour.**

In the Kreutberg Range the 2/13th Battalion had made a further advance during the morning and captured an enemy position astride the track leading to Tirimoro. That move secured our right flank, and our force was now in a dominating position on the high ground, ready for its attack on Kakagog.

The bold move from the main track into the jungle, from a point north of the Bumi river mouth, had been most successful. It had allowed us to get behind the Jap. Harassing fire maintained by our small force at the mouth of the Bumi encouraged the enemy in the belief that it was intended to spring our major assault at that point; while in reality our main force had hacked and fought its way to the outflanking position in the Kreutberg Range.

The move was comparable with a similar intrepid move at Damour. That had proved to be the turning point in the Syrian campaign. On that occasion one battalion held the enemy advantageously placed near the coast, while two battalions scrambled over the rocky watershed to attack inland and rout the Vichy French.

It is on record from the commander of one of the battalions engaged, that Damour and the Kreutberg Range proved without a doubt that there was no country in the world impassable to the Australian infantryman.

### **Slow—But Sure.**

Considerable movement had been observed in the Salankaua Plantation, but it was calculated that the enemy was gradually thinning out his force and strengthening the Kakakog area. From our observation points in the Kreutberg Range we were able to watch his every movement, and he was not able to do anything about it.

Only very slow progress was possible for the two companies of the 2/13th Battalion attempting to gain the high ground west of the Kakakog hospital. Patrols of the 2/15th Battalion found enemy bunker defences on the south side of Ilebbe Creek—a southern tributary of the Bumi river. During that night—Monday, September 27—the Jivevaneng company of the 2/17th Battalion was attacked three times, but all were successfully repulsed with some casualties to the enemy and none to us.

The necessary readjustment of our force protecting Scarlet Beach received almost as much attention as the plans for the Finschhafen thrust. While our artillery poured fire into the Finschhafen area and preparations were being made for regimental concentrations on the Kakakog area, strong-posts were established astride the main tracks leading to the beach.

### **Drain on Fighting Troops.**

A reconnaissance of the Satelberg road indicated that stronger armament was necessary to smash the enemy's disquieting activity. Command signalled Division asking for a squadron of Matilda tanks.

About mid-afternoon the air forces struck at Salankaua Plantation and Kakakog, with dive bombing and strafing runs by R.A.A.F. Vultees and American Bostons.

Up in the hills the 2/13th Battalion, with two companies established on a spur, was still reconnoitring suitable approaches from which an attack on Kakakog could be launched.

The supply problem of these and other troops in the range was becoming more and more acute. The slippery, precipitous slopes were wearing and carrying became a back-breaking job. All stores and supplies including water, had to be man-handled—and there were no "fuzzy-wuzzies" to help out.

The difficulty of carrying out wounded and dead from the regimental aid posts on the tops of the ridges to the main dressing station on the northern side of the Bumi river was increased by the constant use and consequent deterioration of the rudimentary mountain pads. The number of troops engaged in bringing supplies forward and taking stretchers out—as many as six men to one stretcher patient on numerous occasions—necessarily cut in to the total of fighting troops available.



The engineers had assisted in making jeepable roads to a point north of the Bumi crossing, but from there all stores had to be hauled by manpower over the steep cliff faces. A "flying fox" was sought to bridge the ravine from the northern river bank to a high point to the rear of our southern positions, but it was found to be impossible. The engineers, however, volunteered to shift the supplies up and down the ravine faces from the jeephead to the troops, where they were carried forward with the minimum of delay and fighting power to the most forward companies.

Rain on Tuesday night and all day Wednesday delayed battle and added to our difficulties. There were no changes in the dispositions of our troops, although patrols from the 2/15th Battalion probed toward Salankaua, and mortars were directed on the known enemy machine-gun and mortar nests. The dense jungle and deep

ravines in the Kreutberg Range made any attempt by the 2/13th Battalion to move round the enemy's left flank almost impossible, and those troops continued to reconnoitre alternative routes for the pending attack on Kakakog.

Shortly before noon the 2/15th Battalion reported that it had pushed out two platoons in the general line of Ilebbe creek, but enfilade machine gun fire from positions the enemy still held on the Kakakog spur prevented any further exploitation westward by the battalion. The patrols, however, had done their job and it was assumed that the enemy had withdrawn to positions behind Ilebbe creek. A programme of harassing fire by mortar and artillery on the Japanese positions at the mouth of the Bumi and at Kedam Point was maintained the whole time.

### **Reinforcements Arrive.**

At 3.40 a.m. on Thursday, September 30, reinforcements for 20th Brigade Group landed at Scarlet Beach from A.P.D.'s. They were the 2/43rd Battalion from the 24th Brigade of the 9th Division.

The arrival of the 2/43rd Battalion allowed breathing time and a review of the situation. Papuan Infantry patrols and other reports had indicated that the enemy was withdrawing his troops from Finschhafen, Langemak Bay and Logaweng areas, and passing them through Timoro, Gurunkor and Kumawa to the general Satelberg area.

By mid-afternoon fresh troops had taken over from "D" Company of the 2/17th Battalion, two other companies had been moved to Brigade reserve in Heldsbach Plantation, and new arrivals had replaced troops in the beachhead perimeter.

On their return journey to Morobe A.P.D.'s evacuated 139 walking wounded from the main dressing station at Scarlet Beach, where the station had remained since its installation on landing day.

Plans for the assault on Kakakog were completed after further probing by the 2/13th Battalion, and at 4 p.m. the battalion, less one company which was on the high ground to the west of the main battalion concentration, began its movement to the forming-up position below Snell Knell.

No time was to be lost now in making that final, complete smash at Finschhafen.

The 2/17th Battalion moving down from its beach-protection position, relieved the company of the 2/15th Battalion at the mouth of the Bumi, and the 2/15th Battalion moved two companies forward to the north bank of Ilebbe creek, immediately in front of the enemy defences in Salankaua Plantation.

These moves brought the 2/17th Battalion in front of the enemy at the mouth of the Bumi; the 2/15th Battalion in to the centre of the now Brigade front; with the 2/13th Battalion on the high ground on the right flank, which curved from the centre to encircle the enemy in the Kakakog area.

The only apparent way of escape left to the enemy was to his rear.

Shortly after dawn on Friday, October 1—D day for the attack on Finschhafen—the 2/43rd Battalion reported that communication

had been severed with its "A" Company at Jivevaneng, the most westerly point held by the battalion on the Satelberg road. The battalion, less two companies, moved up the Satelberg road to the relief of "A" Company, but when within about 500 yards of Jivevaneng, they contacted the enemy firmly astride the road. Communication with "A" Company was impossible. The besiegers of Jivevaneng were besieged.

That state of affairs had to be left to take care of itself for the time being. The plans for the attack had been made; the attack had to be made.

A few minutes after 10.30 a.m.—half an hour before it was timed to start—the preliminaries to the Kakakog assault were launched with a dive bombing and strafing raid by R.A.A.F. Vultee Vengeance and American Boston planes. Machine guns and mortars pounded the enemy at the mouth of the Bumi, and the regimental concentration by the artillery signalled zero hour for the 2/13th Battalion at 11.15 a.m.

### **Bayonet Every Yard of the Way.**

Swooping down from the hills the Australians were soon in contact with the enemy. Bitter bayonet fighting followed, every yard of the way, as the 2/13th Battalion swept into Kakakog. The Jap. had to be prized from his foxholes and bunkers. Sometimes he showed his teeth; other times he cowered before the determined onslaught. But, every foxhole, every bunker, every Japanese had to be accounted for. It was the climax to 10 days of grim, tough jungle war, and every man had pledged to himself that there would be no anti-climax.

At last light the battalion was within 100 yards of its objective, and there were signs that the enemy could not stand the shock. He was withdrawing. During the action two enemy barges had nosed into Finschhafen harbor, on the immediate seafront of which the fighting was taking place, and were engaged by the artillery. One was destroyed.

At the rear strong enemy patrols had penetrated down the Song river, and the 2/43rd Battalion, in attempting to storm past the road block and release its "A" Company, had suffered heavy casualties. The Papuan Infantry told of more continued movement along the Timoro-Kumawa track by organised parties of the enemy. Those parties included some high ranking officers.

### **Finschhafen Falls.**

Slow, harassing artillery fire was continued on the remaining enemy positions round Finschhafen and the withdrawal routes during the night, and at first light the next day (Saturday, October 2) the attack was continued. The 2/17th Battalion swept across the mouth of the Bumi, while the 2/13th Battalion, elated by its success the previous afternoon, continued mopping up. By 11.30 a.m. both the 2/17th Battalion, moving on the axis of the main north-south track, and the 2/15th Battalion, directed upon Simbang at the head of Langemak Bay, had passed the east-west track at the bottom of Kolem Plantation. They had met only enemy stragglers.

Finschhafen was ours!

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## Chasing Shadows.

An hour after Finschhafen fell our troops had reached the northern shores of Langemak Bay, moving to contact the 22nd Battalion, which, although it had not met any strong resistance, had played a major part in the success of the campaign.

It was this battalion of the 4th Brigade that had marched from Red Beach to Langemak Bay—a march that presented an additional threat to the hard-pressed and badly-rattled Japanese garrison at Finschhafen. Contact between this battalion and the Finschhafen force was made late in the afternoon when they joined hands across the Mape river—the higher reaches of Langemak Bay—in a rowing boat.

On the day the 20th Brigade Group landed at Scarlet Beach and laid siege to Finschhafen, the 22nd Battalion set out along the coast from Hopoi Mission for a walkabout. Hopoi is only 20 miles from Lae. The object of the trek was chiefly a reconnaissance in force to clean out the next 20 miles of coastline and to cause the Japanese a little uneasiness.

From that modest beginning developed one of the greatest marches of the New Guinea campaign. In 10 days the Battalion covered 50 miles of the rough coastal track, fought one engagement and occupied several strong defensive positions on the coast and inland, which the Japanese had abandoned in the face of their advance.

The first enemy resistance was met on the Mongi river, approximately half-way in the trek. After patrol clashes, they crossed the river to tackle the enemy's strong main defences, but found them abandoned and signs of a hasty evacuation. Two heavy guns had been left, together with a complete stock of ammunition and much equipment. The Japs. had apparently moved in only a fortnight before—and had withdrawn without firing a shot from the main defences.

Fording innumerable rivers, trudging along the narrow, tide-washed beaches, turning inland over sharp rises, the 22nd pushed forward at surprising speed, always with patrols combing the scrub ahead and on the flanks.

By Friday, October 1, they had reached Dreger Harbor, and came up against the southern defences of Finschhafen. Once again, however, the Japanese had got out and left behind strong positions.

Still hot on the scent, the weary, rain-soaked, but spirited troops pushed along to the beach and looked across the Mape river toward Finschhafen.

After their Homeric journey of 50 miles through enemy territory in 10 days, the men of the 22nd sat down and brewed themselves tea!

Their job was done. They had cleaned out the whole strip of coastline from Hopoi Mission to Langemak Bay—a feat that enhanced the Finschhafen victory. Now we were assured of anchorages from Lae to Scarlet Beach—truly a thorn in the Japanese hide.

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## Second Battle of Scarlet Beach

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**W**ith the completion of phase one of the Finschhafen campaign—the invasion and the capture of the main objective—there followed a period of necessary readjustment, for the enemy already was pushing strongly from the high ground round Satelberg down on to our same tired and small force.

Reinforced early in October by the troops who got clear from his Finschhafen defences, the Jap. continued to contest fiercely the command of the Satelberg track in the vicinity of Jivevaneng. A small force of our troops had been isolated there, but it managed to extricate itself on October 4, reporting that it had been repeatedly attacked. It had killed 50 Japs. for certain, and it was probable that many more had been killed and wounded. Our casualties had been light.

On October 5, a small party of the enemy was contacted in Kumawa village (almost two miles airline due south of Satelberg) and, without loss to ourselves, was killed off. Although Jivevaneng was evacuated by the enemy under our pressure, the Jap. left much equipment and many dead behind, but he remained astride the main Satelberg road, 500 yards to the west (Satelberg side) of the village. Our forces were still in contact with the enemy at that point on October 7.

Patrols moving north from Kumawa encountered enemy dug-in south-west of Sisi (about one mile to the north). A small party contained that position, while the rest moved round to Sisi, where the Jap. was located in strength. Close contact was maintained throughout October 7, when he unsuccessfully attempted to drive us from our positions on a track leading west from Kumawa.

During that period—October 2 to October 9—natives reported considerable numbers of Japanese moving along the tracks between Satelberg and Palanko, about 800 yards to the north-east of Satel-



berg. Our patrols had inflicted casualties on a Jap. force on the Bonga track, 200 yards north of the Song river. He also attacked our positions north of Scarlet Beach, and, for a while, the situation see-sawed in the hills north of the Song river. By the end of that period our most northerly troops were established approximately 800 yards south of Bonga.

### **Enemy Harassed.**

The enemy was sought and fought wherever our patrols could find him in the next week. The two remaining battalions of the 24th Brigade, with Brigade Headquarters, arrived in the area on the night of October 9 and 10. They were committed immediately. Skirmishes in the general area of Jivevaneng and south from the Satelberg road to Kumawa resulted in many enemy deaths.

A strongly-held position in the Jivevaneng area was overrun on October 9. It was found to contain 108 well-constructed weapon pits. Close contact with the enemy prevented a fuller investigation.

In this and the Kumawa areas the enemy was secreted in dense bamboo thickets, making the reconnoitring and location of centres of resistance extremely difficult. Tirimoro, one of the staging points of the enemy escape route from Langemak Bay, was occupied without opposition on October 13.

To this stage every effort had been made to contain the enemy—and then annihilate him. But there was still much to be done before the second phase of the contract could be fulfilled.

Full use was made of artillery, mortar and light machine gun fire in harassing areas known to be occupied by the enemy, and in others which he was using as his supply routes, both to the north of the Song river and in the Satelberg area.

Up to October 14 action in the Finschhafen area had resulted in 400 certain enemy dead, and native reports had it that wounded were being evacuated to Wareo, where it was known a hospital had been established.

Headquarters of the 9th Australian Division moved up to Finschhafen from Lae on October 10–11, and once again Major-General G. F. Wootten was present on the spot to take charge of operations.

Patrol activity continued normally during the next few days. Enemy parties and positions were engaged and always casualties were inflicted. Artillery continued to pound the enemy at Wareo, Fior, Palanko and Masangkoo—villages in the general area north of Satelberg known to be occupied by the enemy.

But, even as we were containing the enemy and drawing him into the net that was being woven round Satelberg, he continued to show signs of restiveness to press south from Bonga, with sporadic venturings as far south as Kumawa, where there were some exchanges of fire. Our troops in the Jivevaneng area, astride the Satelberg road, came in for continued attention from a strong force of the enemy all day on October 16. Artillery support was used in one unsuccessful attack at



4 p.m., and fighting continued for two hours. That was one of the few occasions on which the enemy used artillery, the previous times having been when he shelled our troops at the mouth of the Bumi river in the first fortnight of the campaign, and the day before (October 15), when he fired a field gun from the north of the Song river.

Summing up the period from October 4 to October 16, it was admitted that while it was relatively static it had been spent in steady preparation. On the enemy's side, it had been spent in marshalling his forces for a further attack to regain his lost base: on ours, the development of aggressive defence of what we had gained.

By October 16, the enemy's intention had become obvious. He was about to launch his counter-attack in force—and, as expected, he hit at Scarlet Beach.

The seven days' bitter struggle that followed will remain outstanding among the highlights of New Guinea fighting. For five of those days our troops fought tenaciously, with their backs to the beach, against a desperate enemy who succeeded on October 18 in capturing Katika and cutting the main north-south road, only vital supply line from Scarlet Beach to the main base of Finschhafen.

The fierceness of our resistance on the first two days resulted in the smashing of the first enemy waves and gave us a brief breathing space. Arrival of the balance of the division (26th Brigade troops) on the night of October 19/20, just as that interim was ending in renewed enemy attacks, tipped the balance and made certain of the ultimate conclusion.

The Jap. fought tooth and nail. At heavy loss to himself, he drove through to the beach, and, from that time until October 23 there was sustained and furious fighting which resulted in the complete clearing and reopening of the road.

### **Scarlet Beach *Scarlet.***

The resurgence of large scale fighting began at 4.45 a.m. on October 17, when the Jap. attempted a landing at Scarlet Beach with part of an infantry company and a detachment of engineers. This force, which was equipped with standard infantry weapons, flame-throwers and demolition sets, had barged silently down the coast under the cliffs north of the Song river to land during a heavy rainstorm in the beating surf on the southern side of the river mouth. Visibility was almost nil, but the Japanese were engaged immediately from the shore by a terrific concentration of fire from Bofors, medium machine-guns and infantry weapons that had been accumulated in anticipation of just some such move.

Two barges were disabled and remained on the beach. A third was observed moving out and north again, with a great deal of squealing from its surviving occupants; many of the Japs. had undoubtedly been either killed or wounded. It is not known whether this third barge succeeded in landing troops.

But it is certain, from the fierce fighting which raged for an hour on that narrow strip of beach, that the enemy was determined to gain a foothold. Morning light revealed the story. Scarlet Beach was scarlet—a cemetery of the Jap. commando force.

They landed close to the same spot where the 20th Brigade troops came ashore to start the Finschhafen campaign on September 22. If ever the hackneyed phrase: "cut to ribbons" was justified, it was in the early morning of October 17. The Japs. wilted before the withering fire from troops guarding the beach.

Only a shelf on the beach cut by the big seas of previous days saved the enemy from complete and immediate annihilation. It enabled some to creep under its cover to the shelter of the jungle across the Song river.

Weather favoured the enemy and they were almost on top of the beach defenders before the alarm was raised. In many instances the defenders could fire only a few shots from their heavier static weapons before the Japs. were on top of them. Grenades and flame-throwers were mixed up in the hand-to-hand struggle that followed for more than an hour. But slowly the tide of battle turned, and the enemy was pushed into the jungle to flee for his life on the north side of the Song river.

Our losses were extraordinarily light. We lost one killed on the beach—an American soldier who had caused great slaughter with his .50 calibre gun. His crew mate was wounded and he fired on alone. A grenade tossed into his gunpit blew off one leg, but he continued to fire until he collapsed from loss of blood.

### **Fanatic Jap.**

The determination of the Jap. to gain a foothold on Scarlet Beach was evident from the number found slaughtered in the holes they had swiftly dug under the shelter of the sea-washed sand ridge. That ridge saved the barges from being disintegrated by point-blank Bofors fire as they beached (the guns could not be depressed far enough); it gave shelter for a time as the enemy tossed grenades over on to our defending troops; and it screened the withdrawal of the rest who gave way under our fierce resistance and crossed the Song river to carry on the fight for a time in the jungle. Australians pursued them into the jungle and almost completely annihilated them.

That brief slaughter was the overture to what was to become the battle for Scarlet Beach. The battle proper began at 11 a.m. that same day, when the enemy launched a determined attack on 2/3rd Pioneer headquarters position on the hills track west of Katika and about 1200 yards from the coast. (On a straight line from this point, through the village, Katika was about 500 yards from the coast). The attack was beaten off, but it was renewed at first light the next day, and the battalion headquarters was forced to withdraw slightly.

A review of the next four days' fighting shows how great

was the enemy's loss if co-ordination of his beach and land attacks was his plan, for he reached the coast at one point and almost there at another.

There was still another danger. Had he not been engaged to such an extent on the Scarlet Beach front—fortunately only a single front—he possibly would have been able to move down the north-south track to Heldsbach and attack, through our thin holding forces, the centre of our base. That, obviously, was his intention.

### **Three Vital Mistakes.**

The situation, however, was never out of hand. The dispositions ordered by the Divisional Command had anticipated, comprehensively, the enemy's thrusts at the beach, which constituted the vital strategic point for the whole area. Three factors helped. The false timing of his thrusts; the surprising smallness of his landing force; and the sub-division of his multi-pronged drive down from the hills, followed by the dissipation of these as he outran his tenuous and ill-prepared supply line between the highlands and the coast. These factors, soon revealed, made it surprising that he fought so tenaciously and for so long. Large bodies of his men were slaughtered en masse. He kept charging in droves, often into our fixed lines of fire.

At mid-morning on October 18, the enemy attack was resumed at several points on a general front extending parallel with Scarlet Beach, from the Song river in the north to beyond Siki Creek. Anti-aircraft gun positions beat off attacks by direct fire from their Bofors, and were supported by nearby troops of field guns firing 25-pounders over open sights. Where he could evade this fire the enemy infiltrated. He gained a position in the track west of Katika, and had also established a post astride the Satelberg road on the coastal side of the Jivevaneng area which was at that time held by our troops.

Finding his frontal attack costly, and having failed to capture our guns, the enemy began to feel for our flanks, usually much to his loss. While feeling out south of his Jivevaneng positions, he also swung south-east to skirt Katika and drive toward the coast. An hour after noon he was attacking toward the centre of Scarlet Beach, approximately 200 to 300 yards from the beach itself.

The main dressing station inland from the northern end of the beach came under heavy fire, and all patients except those who were able to rush to the defence, were evacuated. Mortar fragments tore the sides of the operating tent and machine gun fire ripped between the tents. Miraculously, there were no casualties.

With attacks coming from many quarters the individual pictures were confused, but there was overall a resolute adherence to the Command plan.

A small enemy force reached the coast at the mouth of the Siki creek giving them high ground to overlook the southern end of Scarlet Beach. The evacuation of the wounded under heavy fire was very hazardous, with the enemy pressing on the centre of the beach and threatening its southern point. By last light that day the

position had become steadier, and a close and watchful perimeter had been established round Scarlet Beach.

### **Tide Turns.**

Enemy casualties for that day were severe. It was impossible at that stage to count the many dead lying out of sight in the adjacent kunai and jungle, but the known dead for the day brought the count of enemy dead for the period September 22 to October 18 to 704.

The battle for Scarlet Beach reached its greatest intensity in the next two days. On October 19 the enemy was established in small numbers in Siki creek area from its mouth to the vicinity of Katika. Artillery, mortar and small arms fire constantly harassed him, but along the Scarlet Beach front he pressed doggedly at many points. A counter-attack gave us possession of the high ground north of Katika, and consequently good control over the enemy positions in the lower Siki creek areas.

More units of the Division—most important, the 26th Brigade Group—arrived in Langemak Bay that night, and their timely appearance enabled adjustments to be made in our disposition. These additional troops considerably strengthened the defence of the whole area, the safety of which depended on the outcome of the Scarlet Beach battle.

Very close contact along the entire beach front was maintained the whole of the next day. The Siki creek pocket and the force astride the Satelberg road received constant attention from our artillery and mortar. A force of our troops, mainly pioneers, who had up to this time been isolated by the enemy infiltration, received orders, dropped from a plane on tactical reconnaissance, to rejoin our defence line. Ammunition and supplies had also been dropped, but unfortunately the cannisters of food had missed their mark. By evening of October 21 this force had returned from its positions in the high ground south of the Song river and about 3,500 yards immediately to the west of the beach. They reported having inflicted heavy casualties and produced ample evidence of the effectiveness of our artillery fire.

The tide of battle appeared to turn that day when the enemy withdrew his forward troops slightly, including what remained in the Katika and Siki creek areas. This movement was continued during darkness. He counter-attacked, however, to regain Katika. That counter was launched in the twilight of October 22, from the north-west. Unsuccessful as it was, the attack was maintained in this same area during the evening and next day, with the enemy fanatically throwing droves of massed infantry along a razorback which was completely covered by our medium machinegun fire. His casualties were extremely heavy.

In the meantime, our patrols from Kumawa reported the enemy dug in on the tracks to Satelberg and Sisi. Those tracks forked, one left, and the other right, about 500 yards to the north of Kumawa. Sisi, itself, was clear.

A 75 mm. mountain gun, brought forward by the enemy to a position west of Katika to support his reckless, sustained attack, was

knocked out by one of our 2-pounder tank-attack guns on the morning of October 24. The crew of the 75 mm. gun was wiped out by machine gun fire.

The Jap. had dug-in in the Bonga area during this time, but these positions and a suspected dump at Palanko were harassed constantly by our artillery. Large fires and explosions were seen in the Palanko area.

At the same time an enemy patrol appeared far to the south, in the Mape river area, only to be disposed of.

In the five days from October 25 to 29, the enemy broke away from close contact, under constant pressure from our forward troops, in all areas except the vicinity of Jivevaneng and his other position west of that village astride the Sattelberg track.

While the battle for Scarlet Beach had been won, at great loss to the enemy, it could not be surmised yet that he had given up his attempt to eject us from Finschhafen. Far from it. Strong Australian fighting patrols west from Scarlet Beach and north of the Song river and south of Bonga and toward the Bonga-Wareo track, met opposition every day.

### **Jivevaneng Cleared.**

With our beachhead now thoroughly secured and held within a tighter perimeter, active patrolling was maintained and many casualties were inflicted on the enemy. Our troops east of that westerly enemy pocket on the Sattelberg road pushed forward into close contact with the Jap., and other elements closed in on his southern flank. More strongly held enemy positions were located north of the Song and in the hill country west of Katika. Ambushes were employed freely in dealing with the marauding enemy, who still showed fight.

There was patrol fighting throughout the area from the hilly reaches north of the Song, curving south through Jivevaneng to points below the Sattelberg track. Our newly-won position close to Jivevaneng was counter-attacked unsuccessfully twice in the evening of October 30. Those attacks were renewed by approximately one company the following morning, and there was the usual heavy loss to the Japanese.

Advances in the face of determined resistance on November 2 cleared up by next day the irritating enemy pocket east of Jivevaneng. The Jap. was extremely difficult to locate in the thick bamboo clumps and it was even more difficult to clear him out. Our constant pressure maintained on the morning of November 3 forced him to withdraw and the road as far forward as our most advanced troops—still west of Jivevaneng—was cleared. Still, the Jap. had not given up. A position slightly forward of this gain was immediately counter-attacked by a party of 25. Twenty were killed.

Thus, the confused interlocking positions between Sattelberg and Katika, into which the Jap. had been forced by the firm clamp of our drive after the Scarlet Beach affair, were cleared up in a week's face-to-face and hand-to-hand fighting. So tangled was the

jungle and so well dug-in was the enemy, that often one or two well-placed weapon pits kept our flank-attacking parties apart.

It was at this stage that several changes were effected in the Australian commands. Lieut.-General Sir Leslie Morshead took over from Lieut.-General Sir Iven MacKay as G.O.C., New Guinea Force, the latter having previously taken over from Lieut.-General Sir Edmund Herring, and now having been appointed Australian High Commissioner to India. Sir Leslie Morshead was succeeded as Corps Commander by Major-General F. H. Berryman.

Coincident with these changes, 7th Division reverted to direct command under New Guinea Force, and Major-General Berryman's command was enlarged to include 5th Australian Division. Troops of that division had captured Salamaua and one Brigade had participated in the general Huon Gulf operations.

The Japanese airforces had been active in this period. Between the Australian landing at Scarlet Beach and October 26 there were 115 specific air raids, every section of the area in Australian occupation being methodically pattern-bombed. Even the Casualty Clearing Station near Simbang did not escape, nor did 9th Division headquarters. In one such pre-dawn raid, Brigadier S. T. W. Goodwin, C.R.A., 9th Division, was killed, and bomb fragments penetrated 9th Division Command tent. Brigadier Goodwin was the third Australian Brigadier to have lost his life since the opening of the Lae campaign. Brigadier R. B. Sutherland was killed when an aeroplane crashed while taking off to carry Sir Edmund Herring to Milne Bay after the fall of Lae, and Brigadier H. B. Sewell, C.C.R.A., of the Corps, died of illness.

The Jap. lost men in enormous ratio to our few casualties as he was beaten back and inched out of the ground he had occupied so briefly. His total counted dead to November 3 was 1247. That figure did not include the enemy killed by artillery and mortar fire, nor the number killed in our bombing and strafing raids.

There were minor clashes only in the succeeding days until November 9, when the position on the Divisional front was :—A Brigade force astride the Song and patrolling north to Bonga and the Bonga-Wareo track ; a Brigade front in greater depth and commanding the central approach to Satelberg, and patrolling to within 1500 yards of Satelberg Mission on its soaring 3,200-ft. plateau ; and the third brigade front in still greater depth, commanding positions up to about 800 yards west of Jivevaneng on the main track to Satelberg, and to the south in a line through Kumawa. Sisi, unoccupied by the enemy, was virtually in our hands ; Jap. positions to the south of that village being by-passed by our patrols.

Well to the south, where 4th Brigade, under 9 Australian Division command again since early November, was assigned a protective role over rear lines of approach to Finschhafen, Langemak Bay and the developing areas to the south, patrols saw only occasional signs of negligible and ineffectual enemy movement. The possibility of an attack from the rear, either by sea or land, could not, however, be overlooked by the Command, and, with the limited forces at his disposal he still had to make provision for such eventuality.

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## Assault on Satelberg

**T**he third major action of the Finschhafen campaign began on November 16. It was the assault on Satelberg, and within ten days that great natural fortress, standing high above Finschhafen as a perpetual threat while the Japanese were allowed to hold it, was occupied by the 26th Brigade.

The mission station, roughly five miles airline inland from Finschhafen, had been the southern pivot of continued enemy resistance which had swung north of the Song river, through Bonga and round the coast to Sio and further west. It was evident even after the first ten days' fighting following our landing in mid-September, that the potential Allied base at Finschhafen and Langemak Bay would not be secure until the enemy had been driven from his Satelberg bastion.

In the period immediately preceding our attack, patrols and native reports told of movement back and forth on the Bonga-Wareo track, as well as increased patrol activity on the part of the enemy. Throughout the period up to November 12, the enemy had shown a tendency to patrol in a more determined manner than previously. Up to that date his patrols had not penetrated far from his own lines, but that may have been due as much to our vigorous patrolling and harassing artillery fire as to his policy of limited sorties.

The general picture up till November 15 was very confused, but we had sufficient information to decide that the majority of his force was at Satelberg and to the north, while the forces in the mountainous country to the west of Wareo and down the slopes to the coast were mainly engaged in lines of communication work.

Supply was his greatest problem, and this was supported in two ways. He was obviously conserving ammunition, and the enemy



encountered by our patrols were short of food. Large parties were constantly at work foraging in native gardens, and carcasses of horses and a few cattle were found, evidently slaughtered for meat. Native reports and P.T. boat sightings indicated that there was little or no enemy barge traffic south of Walingai, about one-third of the way up to Sio. P.T. boats were taking heavy toll of the enemy barges that braved the night—so much so that the intensity of protective fires from his shore guns was increased.

The Green Ridge offensive, prelude to the major attack along the Satelberg road on November 17, was completed after a limited attack by artillery, and with machine-gun support, on November 16. This Green Ridge, just east of the junction of the Sisi track and the main Satelberg road, was the start-line for our assault.

### **Tank Support.**

The battle for Satelberg really revolved around the capture of the 2,400 ft. feature about 1,000 yards from our start-line. The hardest fighting of the nine days of this battle occurred on the slopes and round the crest of this half-way hill. The enemy—foxholed and bunkered—held us for a time, but after the capture of "2400" we pushed rapidly forward for 1,100 yards before encountering any further opposition.

The enemy's main line of resistance centred on this feature, just south-east of Satelberg, and its opposite number, the 2,600-ft. feature, about 1,000 yards east of the objective.

The attack on November 17 went in under the usual artillery barrage, but the element of surprise was heightened by the addition of tanks to the concentrated impact of artillery, infantry and machine guns. For a week the squadron of tanks (British Matildas) had remained concealed in the jungle growth at the side of the road, a few hundred yards west of Jivevaneng. They had been barged up the coast from Langemak Bay to Salankaua Plantation where they carried out brief exercises with infantry before being moved forward under cover of darkness.

The rumbling advance of the tanks was drowned by an artillery shoot called for from our most forward positions immediately the first thunder of the tanks advance was heard there and before it could become audible to the enemy. Shells were placed deliberately where they would make most noise, echoing and re-echoing through the deep valleys and against the cliffs. Bulldozers and tractors were employed for the same purpose ahead of the tanks on the road.

This latter subterfuge was repeated on the morning of the attack to conceal the advance of the tanks over the 1,000 yards to the start-line. The artillery opened at zero hour—7 a.m.—with a concentration of fire on the eastern slopes of the "2400" feature, which included the Coconut Ridge to the north of the road. This barrage, a terrific row, was maintained for a quarter of an hour, when it was lifted to the top of "2400" and beyond.





British Matilda tanks were used for the first time in New Guinea in the attack on Sattelberg. Within five minutes of being in action they had proved their worth.



The raising of the barrage was the signal for the machine guns, playing their traditional tactical role, to take over from the artillery in softening up Coconut Ridge.

The attack along the main road by the 2/48th Battalion was the centre of our thrust. At the same time our forces at Kumawa (2/23rd Battalion) moved north, and on our right flank another column (2/24th Battalion) moved north-west up the slopes of the "2,600" feature.

It was heavy fighting all the way on the main road. Within five minutes the tanks had proved their worth by blowing out bunkers and machine-gun posts. But their advance was stopped when the leading tank was put out of action on the narrow one-way road, with a blown track. That halted the infantry's advance and the battle in that area remained static for the rest of the day and the following night, not more than four hundred yards from the 2400 feature.

Advancing along the east track from Kumawa the portion of the 2/23rd Battalion assigned to that role met no opposition and captured Sisi very early in the day. The west track company of the same Battalion was strongly challenged at a point about 1,000 yards from where the east and west tracks forked north of Kumawa. The east track advance joined with the main road column.

The enemy was contacted very early by the advance of the 2/24th Battalion which dug in under the lip of the "2600" feature.

### **Coconut Ridge Ours.**

At last light on this day, as on succeeding days, the enemy shelled and mortared our positions up and down the track forward of Jivevaneng.

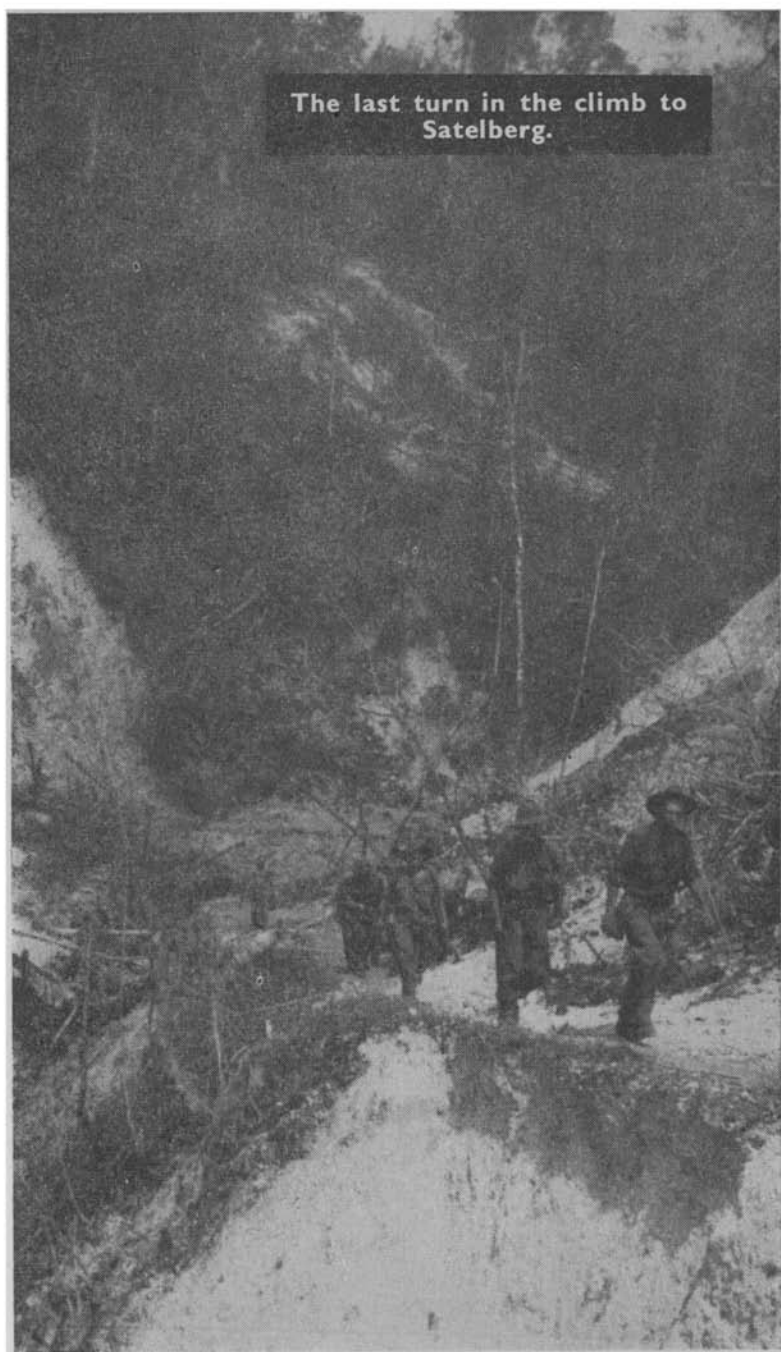
The intensity of the battle did not slacken the following day, and our troops gained possession of Coconut Ridge shortly after midday. The enemy continued to deny us the high ground to the west of this feature, but by nightfall we had gained a footing on the lower slopes. The troops advancing north-west from Kumiawa cleared the opposition of the previous day and pushed on toward the main Satelberg road. Stiffening his stubborn infantry resistance, the enemy brought two guns into action for the first time since the battle of Katika more than a month earlier.

On "2600" our patrols and artillery fire inched the Japs. back, but they were holding strongly on the saddle just west of the feature.

The advance along the Satelberg road continued at first light on November 19. The enemy still had the advantage of the dense bamboo thickets, and our task of dislodging him was made more difficult where he was secreted in well-dug defences with overhead cover. During the night he had become tank conscious, for, in addition to digging three ditches across the track, he had laid contact and magnetic mines.

The Japs. counter-attacked at 6.30 p.m. Not only was this attack completely broken, but our troops grasped the opportunity

The last turn in the climb to  
Satelberg.



given by his disorganisation and occupied the feature for which they had been fighting throughout the day. One 75 millimetre, two 37 millimetre and numerous medium machine guns were knocked out in the attack.

There was no let-up for the infantry, nor the tanks, in the continued assault on "2400" the following day. Success came about mid-morning when we gained command of the high ground, and patrols, advancing north-west from Kumawa, joined the main road force. Much equipment and many weapons were captured, and again enemy casualties were numerous.

### **Dug Out With Bayonet.**

Everywhere the enemy had frantically attempted to deny every yard of ground, and he literally had to be dug out at the point of the bayonet or blasted out with grenades. More evidence of his endeavours to delay and destroy the tanks was found on the main road and the tracks leading from it.

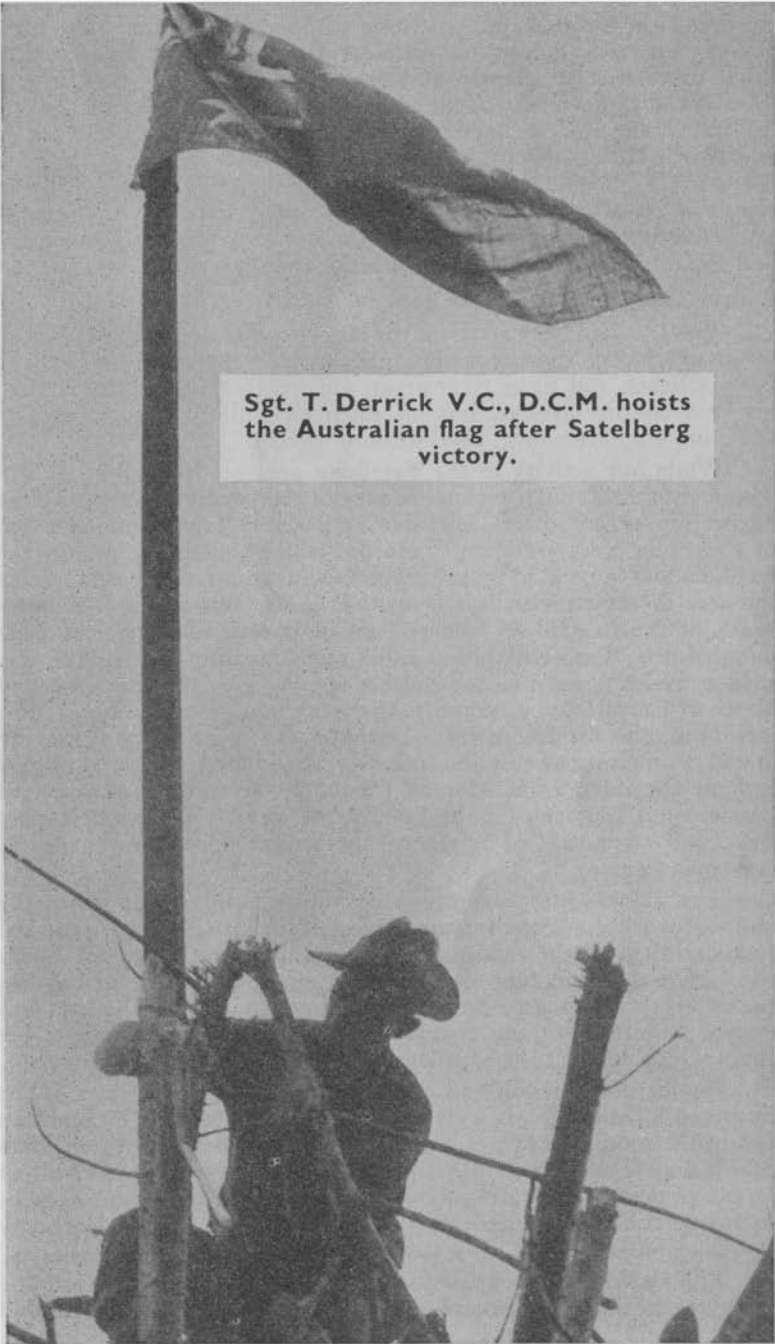
Meanwhile, our column on "2600" was bogged down by the enemy holding superior ground.

It was on this day that the Australian command decided to take the offensive against the enemy's supply line on the Wareo-Bonga track. We had been overlooking this track for some time from a vantage point on North Hill, about 1,500 yards north of Scarlet Beach, and from closely-sited observation posts almost under the Japs' eyes beside the track. Brushing aside scattered enemy resistance with small arms and artillery fire, we were astride the track within a few hours, cutting his supply line and consolidating there before nightfall. The Corps Commander taking immediate advantage of the situation that had developed, stressed the necessity of the plan to cut the Bonga-Wareo track. He considered this to be the main enemy line of communication, and it was calculated that enemy reaction would confirm this appreciation. It did.

The enemy fronting our troops on "2400" withdrew slightly during the night of November 20, and the next day we made several hundred yards before regaining contact with his scattered outposts. They were quickly driven back, and his main forward positions were captured toward evening by the infantry, still with tank support, Going was particularly heavy south of the Sattelberg road.

Our new positions at Pabu astride the Bonga-Wareo track were counter-attacked shortly after noon, but the Jap. was driven off, with casualties. About mid-afternoon, a party of 20 Japs. walked unconcernedly into machine gun fire at short range. Their casualties were almost complete. An hour later another party approached from the same direction—the same result.

With the artillery and air force continuing to smash the enemy's rear areas and other known positions, the advance along the Sattelberg road was continued on November 22. The main drive was straight up the road, with an outflanking movement in the tangled undergrowth about 300 yards west of the road. Away to the

A black and white photograph showing a soldier, Sgt. T. Derrick, in silhouette, climbing a structure to hoist the Australian flag. The flag is flying from a tall pole against a light sky. The soldier is positioned in the lower center, reaching up towards the flagpole. The flag is partially unfurled and shows the Union Jack in the canton. The scene appears to be on a battlefield or a fortified position, with some debris or structural elements visible in the foreground.

**Sgt. T. Derrick V.C., D.C.M. hoists  
the Australian flag after Satelberg  
victory.**

east the enemy launched a double-headed attack north of the Song. At first light he attacked, with one company down the coast from Bonga, but was driven off with at least one-third killed. The other drive was apparently of battalion strength and was directed toward the Song river. This also failed, but the Jap. managed to infiltrate dangerously close to our forces protecting Scarlet Beach and North Hill, and it took much combing of the jungle to clear out the last stragglers. Mortar and artillery fire gave valuable support in repulsing this vain drive. The enemy appeared with another unsuccessful attack on our forces on the Bonga-Wareo track at 5 p.m., and again his casualties were proportionately heavy.

### **Gun Emplacements Bombed.**

The Jap. had been active in the air every day since November 19, but in every case his strikes were futile. Several were directed at the Scarlet Beach and Song river areas, apparently designed to support his land counter-attacks, but his main air activity was directed at our gun emplacements, also without success.

While our activity in the Sattelberg area on November 23 was confined to a thorough reconnaissance of the enemy positions before beginning further direct offensive action, the Japs. actions north of the Song were puzzling. He did not immediately mount the second attack suggested by precedent, so our troops set about clearing the area in their immediate front. Free use was made of mortars south of North Hill and several small parties of stragglers were mopped up. Pino Hill, about 1,000 yards north of North Hill, was shelled by 25-pounders, and patrols operating to the south-west of North Hill, collected a quantity of enemy equipment and weapons, including one flamethrower. Over to the west patrols moving inland from Kumawa found recently abandoned enemy positions and on the track from Moreng (about 3,000 yards south-west of Kumawa) to Mararuo (about 4,000 yards directly north of Moreng and 2,500 yards west of Sattelberg) there were signs of recent heavy movement north.

The assault on Sattelberg—our troops jumping off from the ford about 300 to 400 yards south-west of the mission—was renewed next morning up the road and along the high ground to the north west. On the road the enemy was in strength on one of the last ridges below the scarp, but a flanking movement to the east destroyed a strong post and enabled the force to reach the edge of the kunai which marked the southern end of the Sattelberg plateau.

Sattelberg, a mission and convalescent centre in the days of the Lutheran missionaries, is a cleared kunai patch standing high on the first of the mountain ranges rising to the inland heights of the Huon Peninsula. The cleared plateau gave the enemy choice at will of defensive posts, but it also offered—for the first time in the Finschhafen operations—the opportunity for our troops to engage the enemy in open country.

The flanking movement to the east of the road inspired the enemy to mount an expensive counter-attack. It was repulsed, and



**Sgt. T. Derrick, V.C., D.C.M.**

at last light our troops were within 150 yards of Satelberg crest. On the left, the other drive manoeuvred into position, and attacked southward down the ridge behind Satelberg. The Jap. counter attacked this force from the north and west, but here again he was out-thought. A slight tactical retirement brought the two enemy forces against each other and soon both waves were shooting up each other. They were assisted impartially by the original object of their attack—the 2/23rd Battalion. Then, before the enemy had time to sort himself out, the 2/23rd Battalion surged forward and reoccupied its advanced line.

Over on the “2600” feature, the 2/24th Battalion was continuing its own war. The enemy was well dug in on the saddle, just west of the feature, but it was evident that he had suffered heavy casualties under the continued artillery hammering, for many graves were found subsequently in the area.

Satelberg was ours at 9 a.m. on November 25.

In the face of the weakening opposition, the “3200,” a few hundred yards north-west of the mission, was captured by midday. The balance of the forces on the heights had withdrawn over night. The magnificent sally at last light on November 24 apparently had convinced the Jap. of the futility of further resistance.

Strongly entrenched, the enemy, with machine guns well placed above our grimly-attacking forces just below the summit, had held throughout the day and was still invulnerable, apparently, at evening. Orders to withdraw for the night had been given, but one platoon sergeant saw a chance of success and took it. He pleaded for, and was given, another 20 minutes for a last attack. That attack cleared out the machine gun nests, and opened the way to the summit. By dark enemy resistance was broken, and in the morning only the advance on the plateau was necessary.

The platoon sergeant was Sgt. T. Derrick, D.C.M., of 2/48th Battalion and his deed was recognised later by the award of the Victoria Cross.

The citation accompanying the award read:—

*“For most conspicuous courage, outstanding leadership, and devotion to duty.”*

*On November 23, 1943, Sgt. Derrick assumed command of 11 Platoon ‘B’ Company 2/48th Aust. Inf. Bn. during the intensive operations preceding the fall of the Japanese stronghold of Satelberg.*



*The following day 'B' Coy. was ordered to outflank strong enemy positions sited on a most precipitous cliff-face and, when successful, to attack a feature only 150 yards from the township of Satelberg. Due to the nature of the country, the only possible approach to the town lay through an open kunai patch situated directly beneath the top of the cliffs. Over a period of two hours, many attempts were made by our troops to clamber up the slopes to their objective, but on each occasion the enemy prevented success with intense M.G. fire and grenades.*

*Shortly before last light the Company Commander reported that the chances of reaching the vital ground above him and holding the ground he already occupied seemed hopeless, and the Company was ordered, and had actually commenced, to withdraw. On receipt of this order, Sgt. Derrick, displaying dogged tenacity, requested one last attempt to reach the objective. His request was granted.*

*Moving ahead of his forward section he personally destroyed, with grenades, an enemy post which had been holding up this section.*

*He then ordered his second section around and on the right flank. This section came under heavy fire from L.M.G.'s and grenades from six enemy posts. Without regard for personal safety, he clambered forward well ahead of the leading men of the section, and hurled grenade after grenade, so completely demoralising the enemy that they fled, leaving weapons and grenades.*

*By this action alone the Company was able to gain its first foothold on the precipitous ground.*

*Not content with the work already done, he returned to the first section, and, together with the third section of his platoon, advanced to deal with the three remaining posts in the area. On four separate occasions he dashed forward and threw grenades at a range of six to eight yards, until these positions were finally silenced.*

*In all, Sgt. Derrick had reduced ten enemy posts. From the vital ground he had captured the remainder of the Battalion moved on to capture Satelberg the following morning.*

*Undoubtedly Sgt. Derrick's outstanding gallantry, fine leadership and refusal to admit defeat in the face of a seemingly impossible situation resulted in the capture of Satelberg. His outstanding gallantry and thoroughness were an inspiration to his platoon, and to the remainder of his Company, and served as a conspicuous example of fearless devotion to duty throughout the whole Battalion."*

### **Record Artillery Pounding.**

*During the night November 24/25, the enemy had cleared out from round the "2600" feature and patrols found Palanko unoccupied. Other patrols radiating from Satelberg reached Mararuo without opposition; and on November 26 Masangkoo and other northern villages were occupied by our troops.*

*The Jap., however, remained in strength north of the Song river. He was in pillboxes and, although engaged by the artillery, prevented our supply column getting through to the isolated force on the*



Bonga-Wareo track. From the day the track was cut until November 27, when a carrier line finally got through, all supply to this force was by air-dropping.

At dawn on November 26 the enemy bombarded and attacked our position astride the track. The shelling came from at least two 75 millimetre guns and mortars; the attack was supported by medium machine guns and flame-throwers. For two and a half hours the attack was pressed, when the Jap. was forced to withdraw. At 9 a.m. our troops, supported by tanks and Vickers machine guns, attacked and captured Pino Hill, after the feature had been subjected to a record concentration (for New Guinea) of 2360 rounds from 25-pounders. There was little resistance to our troops there and extensive positions had been abandoned, but to the north-west, between Pino Hill and the road block, we found the enemy still in strength.

The enemy continued to shell our forward positions at Pino Hill and on the Wareo track, but any major threat to Scarlet Beach—and therefore to the whole Finschhafen base area—had been removed by this clearance of the area north of the Song, combined with the capture of the commanding foothills inland.

### **Tenacious Bravery.**

Historians will refer to that engagement as the Battle of Pabu. No better description of the action can be recorded than that written on the spot by the representative of the London Times and which is repeated here:—

“ A story of outstanding gallantry and success is that of an A.I.F. force which for ten days has been sitting astride the main supply route of the Jap. forces north of Finschhafen.

“ While Sattelberg operations were still in progress, this force was sent north right up into enemy territory to cut the enemy's main supply route from the coast. This route runs inland from Bonga, a small native village on the coast about three miles due north of the Song river. Up it the Japs. have hauled 70 millimetre guns as well as handcarts loaded with supplies and ammunition.

“ So densely covered and deeply ravined was the terrain that it took Australians one whole day to reach their destination, although distance as the crow flies is only three miles. They met slight opposition on the way and killed about 12 Japs. in isolated pockets. At last light they dug themselves in on a small feature overlooking the track.

“ The following morning a party of Japs. came walking down the track from the west their rifles slung and without a care in the world. The Australians opened up with two Vickers at a distance of 300 yards and got the lot.

“ Shortly afterwards another party of 20 came along blissfully unaware that anything was wrong. But their leader saw some remains of previous massacre, gave warning, and this time the Australians registered only eight certainties.

## **Grim Ordeal.**

" By this time the Japs. had realised what had happened. They quickly brought up at least two 70 millimetre guns, heavy mortars and mortars of a type not previously used in this theatre. This is a type of spigot mortar firing square projectile filled with picric explosive attached to an 18-inch wooden stick. The Australians nicknamed it 'potato masher' from the shape of the projectile.

" For the next eight days the Australians were to go through as grim an ordeal as any Australian troops have been through during past three months. Their perimeter was only 150 yards across at the widest point. The Japs. were able to shell and mortar from close range and had plenty of ammunition. Their 70 millimetres were fired through open sights at less than 1,000 yards range. Veterans who had known shelling at Tobruk and in the desert reckoned this was far worse for their positions were close together. They had to lie in shallow trenches, unable to disperse. The shelling soon transformed the wooded knoll into a complete shambles with all foliage blown clean away from the trees. Casualties were, of course, inevitable.

" The Japs. made attack after attack. Their unrelenting pressure, chiefly from the south-west, was a sure indication of the importance they attached to keeping this track open. For eight days the Australians were intermittently under fire from artillery, mortars, machine-guns, rifles and grenades.

" The heaviest attack came on November 26, when the Japs. first put over an intense bombardment and then attacked with everything they had, including flame-throwers. The Australians held their ground and inflicted heavy casualties. The flame-throwers never had a chance to go into action, for men operating them made easy targets and were quickly picked off.

" When the force was finally relieved they had counted 184 enemy dead, to which total must be added the large, but unknown, number of Jap. dead either not found or else buried by their own people, and a large number of wounded.

" Throughout this action the Australians hardly slept at all. At night the Japs. would sneak up to the perimeter and some penetrated right inside it. One was killed in the regimental aid post. At night the Australians relied chiefly on hand grenades and the silence was broken at frequent intervals by explosions of these missiles, which both sides used extensively.

" As one officer put it, 'you either kept awake or were killed.'

" A carrier party, which went up on November 21 (the day after the force took up its positions) was unable to get through owing to enemy opposition. Two days later a party came out with serious cases of wounded. It took them nine hours to reach the rear positions. The worst cases were carried on stretchers; walking wounded struggled along doing their best to help each other. Thereafter a few armed parties got through, but for the most part supplies

were dropped from the Douglas transports, priority being given to ammunition, then medical supplies, then food. Red, blue and white parachutes were used as blankets and also to make stretchers. Food consisted almost entirely of the excellent field operational ration and emergency ration developed by the Australian army. Water was obtained from a small creek outside the perimeter. Small parties went out to collect it after nightfall and were often fired upon.

"A Boomerang, which flew over, dropped some copies of 'Guinea Gold,' the Army newspaper. That was greatly appreciated.

### Doctors' Difficulties.

"When this operation was originally planned it seemed likely that the battalion might be cut off for several days and unable to evacuate its wounded. Accordingly, an advanced dressing station went up in addition to the regimental aid post. The two doctors had to contend with appalling difficulties. They, like everyone else, were in the front line. The R.A.P. was demolished early by shell-fire. The wounded had to lie in shallow trenches, sometimes for several days through all the bombardments, with bullets whistling just overhead. At night it was impossible to use a light, and in attending to wounded the doctors had to *feel* where wounds were and then apply dressings as best they could. They ran out of dressings early in the action, but fortunately captured Japanese bandages and dressings filled the gap. 'Nothing,' said the medical officers, 'could have exceeded the uncomplaining bravery of the wounded, unless it were the untiring and devoted efforts of stretcher-bearers and medical orderlies.' The feature which the Australians occupied was given the name of a Papuan boy who was a devoted servant of the O.C. of the force, a former resident of New Guinea. The officer sent the boy out with a stretcher party on the third day. The boy wept bitterly, afraid that his master would no longer get his 'kai-kai' or be looked after properly. The Japs. fought with great ferocity and determination. They were well-built, nuggety specimens showing no signs of insufficient feeding. Several were found wearing Australian clothing, probably hoping by this ruse to cause confusion in our ranks.

"On one occasion a padre was searching a corpse lying face downwards for identity tags. Even to the steel helmet the clothing was that of an Australian soldier. Unable to find the tag the padre rolled the body over. It was a Jap.

"Although apparently well fed, there was a high percentage of wounded and bandaged Japs. taking part in the attack. A medical officer examined one body which had a large operative scar 8 by 4 inches on the chest under the right arm, evidently where a wound had been treated. The muscles and tissues had been skilfully sewn together about (in the doctor's opinion) 10 days previously, for the muscles were just beginning to heal. In the Australian army such a case would have been evacuated straight back to Moresby. It illustrated either

the fanaticism of the enemy (as the M.O. thought) or merely different standards of care for men which prevail in the Jap. army.

"In every action, however grim and desperate, there are always some light touches. Everyone in the battalion was amused over the case of a young reinforcement straight from a training camp in Australia seeing action for the first time. He fired only one shot. With it he killed a Jap. officer from whom he removed a beautiful sword, good wristwatch, fountain pen, silver pencil and wallet. Immediately afterwards he got something for which his mates envied him even more—a 'homer,' a wound sufficiently serious to necessitate his evacuation to the mainland. Another young reinforcement, also seeing action for the first time, spotted a Jap. coming down the track. He turned to an experienced old sergeant just behind him and whispered, breathlessly, 'What shall I do?' 'Well,' replied the sergeant, 'You can either hold my cigarette while I shoot him, or shoot him yourself!'"

### **On to Wareo.**

Enemy dead counted since the Finschhafen operation began on September 22 totalled 1848 on November 27. It is interesting to note that this number (actually counted) is almost four times that in the fighting for Lae (500).

Our own battle casualties were, relatively, light. Undoubtedly the use of tanks with advancing infantry saved many lives and spared us many wounds.

Artillery was used here as never before in the New Guinea campaign. Its handling was characterised by boldness and the quantity of ammunition used; 12,500 rounds were used in 10 days. Air support had the same effect, shaking severely the enemy's morale and limiting his supply and reinforcements. Similarly, the constant night patrolling of P.T. boats up the coast toward Sio reduced enormously the volume of food, ammunition and reinforcements brought forward by the enemy.

The fall of Satelberg coupled with the capture of the high ground at Pabu put a period to the Huon Peninsula campaign, but the operation could not end there. As the victorious Satelberg force moved steadily on Wareo to the north, our developing pressure between that inland track junction and Bonga, on the coast, marked the starting point for the next, northward, phase in the battle for New Guinea.

The capture of Pabu and the consequent severing of the enemy's line of communication from Wareo to the coast gravely weakened the enemy's hold on Satelberg and Wareo. Boldness in planning and tenacious bravery in holding Pabu were important factors in the capture of both Satelberg and Wareo.

**W**hile the period from November 28 to December 31 included the storming of Wareo, the final clearing of the enemy from the Bonga-Wareo track, and the routing of the enemy from the hinterland, the most important features of the month's activities were the "blooding" of the 4th Brigade, who relieved tired A.I.F. troops on the coast, and the fantastic race toward Sio after the enemy's resistance on the coastal track had been broken.

It was contemplated that a drive north along the enemy's coastal supply line would force him to abandon the whole Wareo position; at the same time driving him inland in his withdrawal, and restricting him to a network of ill-defined native pads.

The 4th Brigade, part of which had, because of the limitation of active labour, been engaged largely in the unloading of ships and the servicing of forward troops, was selected to make the coastal advance. At the same time 9th Division reinforcements arrived and the division's tank strength was increased.

The 4th Brigade (Brigadier C. R. V. Edgar) included the 22nd Battalion, which had marched from Hopoi Mission to Langemak Bay in 10 days during the first Finschhafen "show." It was called on now to do some vicious fighting before the enemy was driven into retreat.

It was the first action for most of the brigade, but there was never any doubt that the "green" troops would do well. They had the whole-hearted support and well-wishing of the A.I.F. when they crossed the Keleung river for their first fight. With tank support, they smashed into the enemy's defences and from that day never looked back. Theirs was a worthy contribution to the Lae-Finschhafen campaign, which, in less than four months, had taken Australian troops to within a few miles of Sio, one of the larger Jap. barge staging points on the Huon Peninsula.

These young troops learned their job in association with seasoned soldiers of two other formations, in particular the 24th Brigade.

The tactical plan, in which they first shared, provided for 4th Brigade to advance up the coast to Lakona, for 26th Brigade to secure Wareo, and for 24th Brigade to secure the Bonga-Wareo track.

Following the fall of Sattelberg on November 25, the 26th Brigade troops pushed down the steep gullies and climbed the formidable ridges to Wareo, suspected as the Jap. base for the Finschhafen campaign. The tortuous march from Sattelberg to Wareo, which in one spot included a drop into a gully of 3,000 feet and a climb, hand over hand to the next ridge, of more than 2,500 feet, was carried out by already tired troops who had fought grimly for the Sattelberg fortress. That march has been likened to the Kokoda Trail and the crossing of Mt. Tambu in the approach to Salamaua. The story is one of blood, sweat and death.

Fighting over such country was the least of worries for the 26th Brigade in its advance on Wareo; stores and ammunition had to be carried over the same route—more often by soldiers than by natives, for the trail was too dangerous for the latter.

As the trail was pushed steadily forward, there was the usual skirmishing with the skulking, ambushing enemy, and for a time resources were strained when the Jap. cut the supply line at the rear of the 2/23rd Battalion. Another trail was, however, hacked through bamboo to the west to skirt the enemy astride the main track, and the fight out front went on.

### **Capture of Wareo.**

When the pressure was applied on Peak Hill, a little to the south of Wareo, and on the high ground immediately in front of Wareo, the Jap. decided he had had enough. We were overlooking his positions in the valley and it was useless for him to resist further. Our advance swept through Wareo and down the Bonga Track, only to be held at a road junction, which included a high feature most suitable for defence between the two roads.

The capture of Wareo on December 8 was a monument to indomitable courage and endurance in the face of the most discouraging difficulties. Even native bearers collapsed under the comparatively light loads they carried up the precipitous mountain track. Our troops not only manhandled their weapons, ammunition and supplies up exhausting cliffs, but they fought their way forward against a deeply entrenched enemy, who commanded all the approaches up the razor back ridges.

But it all ended with the famous Blue Ensign, which had commemorated so many Australian achievements, flying over Wareo after the victory.

The track was littered with discarded clothing, empty ammunition boxes, cartridge cases, bloodstained bandages—his and ours alike—and reeked with a nauseating smell of enemy dead. Undoubtedly many Jap. bodies not included in our count were entangled in the treetops and vines down the sides of cliffs over which they had crashed. In some places bodies could be seen grotesquely pinioned in the inaccessible trees below.

A black and white photograph showing a dirt path or road. On the left side of the path, there is a deep, rectangular foxhole. The ground is uneven and appears to be composed of mud and loose soil. There are some small plants and debris scattered around the foxhole. The lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting an overcast day or a shaded area.

Mud and Jap. foxholes on the  
Wareo track.



## Nightmare Climbing.

The mud had to be accepted, but rain had made firm sections of the trail as slippery as ice, and it was impossible to negotiate the track without half a dozen falls. The weight of the body thrown back on the heels raised blisters, which in turn broke and chafed raw. Every step was an agony and the drag of the pack on the back a torment. The enemy destroyed bridges in his wake and our troops had to ford fast-flowing streams and erect makeshift bridges.

Climbing, if such a nightmare experience could be called climbing, up to Wareo from the bed of Song river took an exhausting three hours. The track rose sheer as far as the eye could see. In places a rest was essential every 10 or 15 yards. Distance as always was not measured in miles. It was measured in time.

Meanwhile, troops of the 24th Brigade were pushing steadily west along the Bonga-Wareo track, and a battalion of 20th Brigade was advancing north to cut the track at its centre. Resistance was met by the former troops who were supported by tanks.

The westward advance of 24th Brigade began from Pabu, against opposition. Soon it was held up by enemy in well prepared positions, and one of the two tanks allotted in support was disabled after fighting a duel with enemy guns. It received some forty direct hits from a 37 m.m. gun. Battalions leap-frogged and by-passed each other to secure day-to-day advances of a few hundred yards at a time.

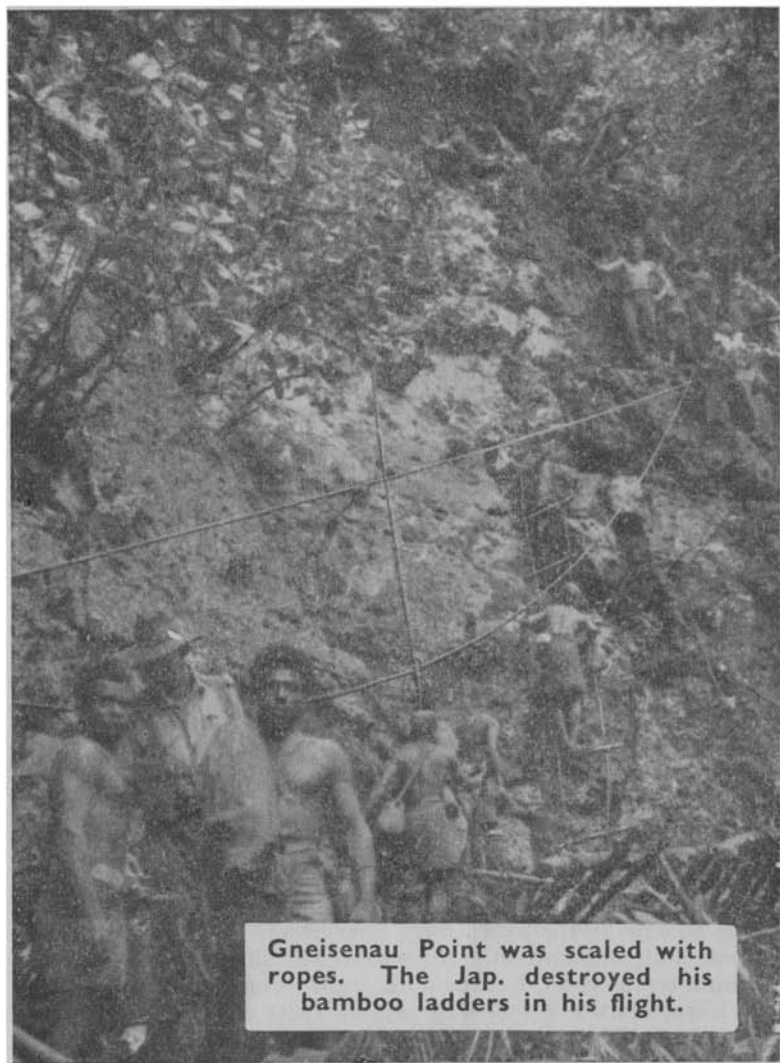
The combined pressure of the integrated drive by the three brigades was too strong to withstand. The enemy was forced out of the Wareo and Bonga-Wareo track areas, as our troops dealt piecemeal with a series of small but hotly defensive delaying actions.

At the same time as their advance was continuing along the Bonga-Wareo track, 24th Brigade troops were also exploiting further north to Bonga and the coastal village of Guisika. (Actually the Bonga-Wareo track was a misnomer. The track began from the coast at Guisika, which is slightly to the north of Bonga). The 4th Brigade was moving behind in reserve and the time when they would be committed was drawing close.

4th Brigade started its main attack up the coast on December 5. The leading battalion, with tanks in support, soon came up against solid enemy bunkers protected by a minefield, and, while the infantry by-passed and continued the advance, the tanks could not catch up with them for some days. Enemy tank mines with extra "booster" charges attached blew the tracks from several tanks and from the bulldozers which magnificently carried out their role of clearing a way for the tanks, often under enemy fire. On the second day of this advance, the coastal troops encountered the first remnants of the enemy moving back from the Wareo area. They were ambushed and 12 were killed.

With the clearing of the Bonga-Wareo track, the two arms of the Australian advance up the Huon Peninsula became more closely linked. The enemy rearguard force covering the retreat from Wareo wilted in the face of a concerted attack in the morning of December 13.





Just when the battle for the road junction developed on the Bonga-Wonga track, troops in the coastal sector reached the mouth of the Sanga river. The race up the coast had started—no word other than “race” was applicable. The speed of the advance was determined only by the speed with which the artillery and supplies of food and ammunition could be brought forward by sea and jeep track—not by the resistance offered by the retreating enemy.

By December 20 our coastal drive had stormed across the broad flat mouth of the Masaweng River and was approaching Fort-

ification Point, an ideal spot for the Jap. to attempt to hold our thrust. But he fled, abandoning, after a three hours fight in which our tanks broke his spirit, his attempt to delay us in the narrow defile that skirts along the cliff face under the brow of the imposing natural fortress.

The triumphant Australian advance continued throughout the next week, the only pause being made on Christmas Day, when the troops in the most forward areas, as well as those in the rear racing to keep up, were fed turkey and ham as a special treat.

By December 30, the Jap. rearguard had become a disorganised rabble and our troops, with Sio in sight, were hot in pursuit. Prodigious feats of bridge-building and roadmaking were performed by the sweating, slaving engineers and pioneers, who worked night and day to hack, smash and blast the roads, to throw bridges over swollen streams and to clear the way up cliff faces. The sounds of engineering drowned the sounds of war; the only enemy left to the troops was the country, which had changed since they left Fortification Point from thick, stifling jungle to broad, sweeping grasslands terraced back from the coastal cliff.

After their four weary months in the jungle they came out on the plain to look as if on a new world. Their spirits (if spirits of a victorious army could be higher) were lifted by the sight of knee-deep grass, and they swept on with renewed energy. The sun was hot and mercilese, but it was like a breath of new life after the wet claustrophobia of the jungle.

### **Flees! Abandons Equipment.**

Nowhere now was the opposition offered by the enemy of any note. All the way from the Masaweng to Sialum small parties of emaciated and dying Japs. were met. At times the Australians caught up with wounded stragglers, who had been left to die by their brothers-in-arms. Ideal places for ambush and defence had been passed by the enemy. Apparently he had only one thought in mind—to put between himself and the Australians as much distance as was possible in the least time. Everywhere he abandoned stores of food and ammunition. He was never short of artillery ammunition on the coast, but there his flight was so hurried he did not get a chance to use it—a completely different story from Sattelberg, where his limited supplies of ammunition helped us considerably. Only at odd times would he harass our advancing patrols, not bothering to drag his heavy guns with him. The coastal track told a pitiable story of an enemy that had been outgunned, outmanoeuvred, outfought and almost outrun.

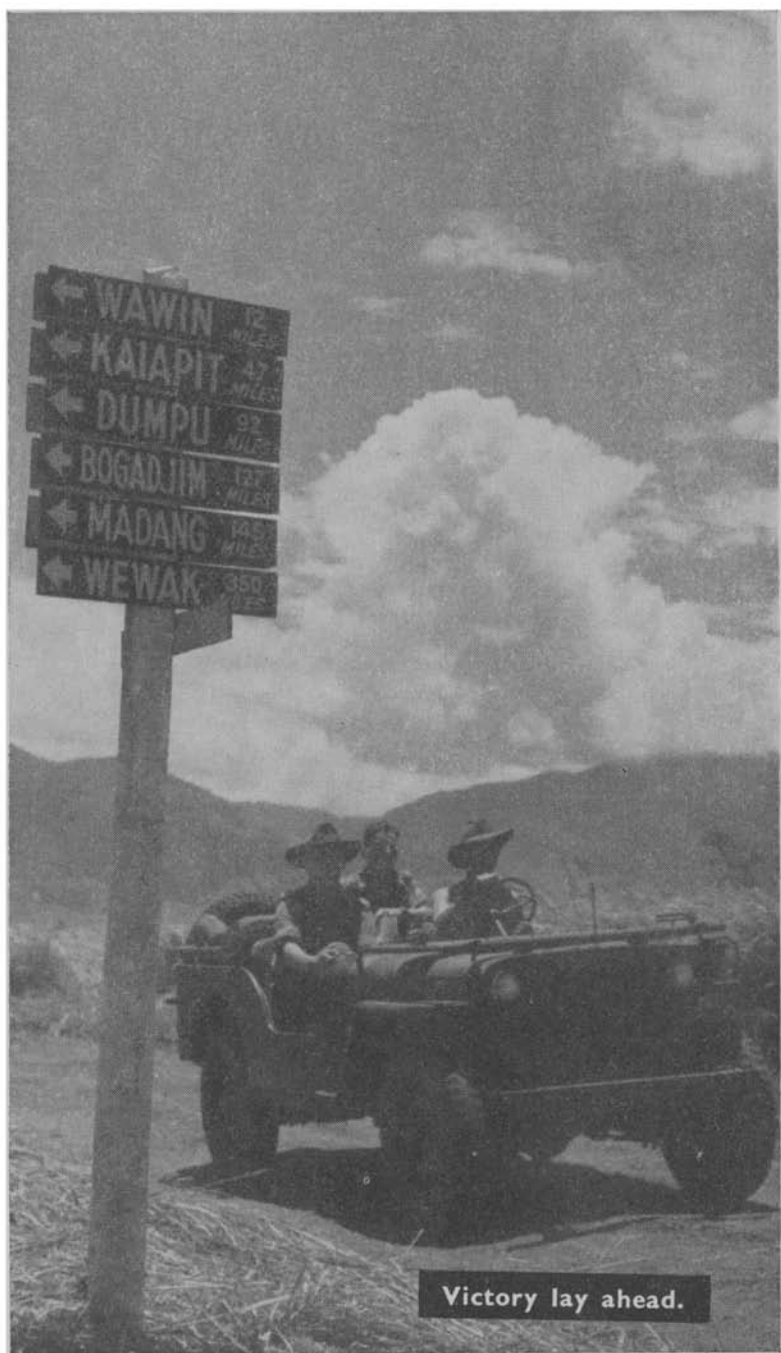
Early in the New Year we were knocking at the doors to Sio. Before we could reach that former Jap. barge staging point we had to crack Gneisenau Point, but by January 14 our forward patrols were in Sio Mission, and the next day one battalion was concentrated at Namberewa—troops from the brigade that made the initial landing on Scarlet Beach on September 22.

# VALLEYS CAMPAIGN

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MARKHAM-RAMU  
KAIAPIT  
DUMPU  
SHAGGY RIDGE

*September 17th, 1943 —  
February 1st, 1944*



Victory lay ahead.

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## Commandos at Kaiapit

**E**LEMENTS of the 7th Division were still being flown into Nadzab when Lae fell.

Turning back from Lae, and gathering in the late arrivals, the division undertook immediately the second stage of its planned programme—a thrust up the Markham Valley to Kaiapit, and thence into the Ramu Valley.

Kaiapit had before the war a native population of between 600 and 700. It had been the main mission station of the Markham Valley, and a patrol base camp. Most important of all, there was an old air strip capable of development for what had now become urgent military needs.

The distance from Nadzab to Kaiapit was only 44 miles, but movement by land over the otherwise flat, grassy floor of the valley was extremely difficult because of the many swift and boulder-strewn streams intersecting the area. The wide Leron river, in particular, was a formidable obstacle.

Although he had under-estimated the importance of Nadzab, the enemy was alive to the value of Kaiapit, where he maintained a sizeable force.

On the day that the 7th Division took Lae, the American air officer attached to the division, after a personal reconnaissance of the west bank of the Leron river, reported that it should be possible to land troop-carrying transports on the plain.

That opened the way for the second phase of the "valleys" campaign, and on the following day, September 17, a special Australian force made its appearance on the Kaiapit side of the Leron river. It comprised members of the 2/6th Cavalry (Commando) Squadron. This second airborne incursion into enemy territory was a bold move, but, surprisingly, no enemy opposition was met during the actual landing.

A large force of Japs. had been reported moving down the valley in a belated attempt to dispossess us of the airfield at Nadzab, and the role assigned this single unit of Australians was to meet and delay them. Patrols were pushed out from the plain toward Sangan, the first of a series of native settlements which make up Kaiapit. Contact was not made with the enemy until the next morning, when after a brisk skirmish at Sangan, which cost the enemy 20 dead, a perimeter was set up in a coconut grove.

Shortly after nightfall a native runner entered the Australian lines with a message addressed to a Japanese officer. He discovered too late that Sangan was now held by the Australians. The message told of the impending arrival of enemy reinforcements at Kaiapit. Later, a party of five Japanese arrived, following the same track as the native, but they did not live long enough to realise their mistake.

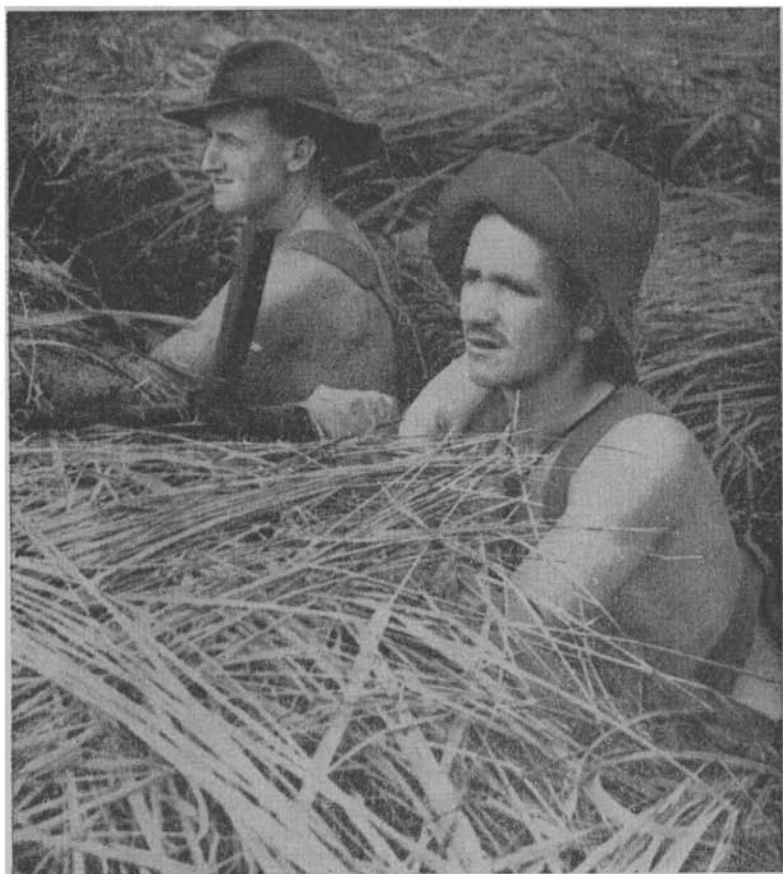
### **Decisive Bayonets.**

During that night the enemy patrolled actively, probing and testing our lines, and at dawn an attack in strength was launched against the Australian positions. "Woodpeckers," light machine guns and grenade dischargers opened up on the platoon holding the perimeter, and the Japs. reached within five yards of the Australian positions. There was only one answer; the Australians fixed bayonets and came out at the enemy and decided the issue by hand-fighting on level ground.

The terrain in the Kaiapit area is relatively open. The head-high kunai and sparsely planted coconuts did not offer the Japanese much opportunity of exploiting his favourite programme of digging in at concealed positions. The Australians, veterans in open warfare before Japan's entry into the war, were as much in their element as the Japanese were out of theirs. How well they fought is shown by the fact that in a 70-yard advance they killed more than sixty enemy. A Jap. almost every yard of the way was good fighting, even though five of them were killed by one bomb from a 2-inch mortar. At 7.30 a.m. the commandos were through Kaiapit, and were engaged with a fresh enemy force on the other side.

Meanwhile, another platoon had moved around on the right, encountering solid opposition, and were level with Kaiapit. A small party of Japanese outflanked them and came round to attack the unit headquarters. They were beaten off, but men had to go out under fire to hide the wounded, who lay only 30 yards from the Japs. One man with a fractured femur was dragged into the bushes by his leg.

Fierce exchanges occurred throughout the morning, and at noon the Australians faced a critical ammunition shortage. It was impossible to call for air-dropped supplies from Nadzab because during the clash at Sangan an enemy bullet had wrecked the radio. Ammunition had to be taken from the Australian dead, and the wounded passed theirs to the men still capable of fighting, but expenditure was rapid because of the persistence of enemy attacks.



Eager eyes watch for enemy movement.

Faced with a desperate position, the Australians resorted again to a "full front" bayonet attack, before which the Japanese panicked, fired haphazardly and inaccurately, and then died. One officer, armed only with a bayonet, cleared two machine-gun posts and was killed attacking a third. Captured guns were turned against the Jap., who broke completely and threw himself into the high kunai at the foot of a feature on the right of the village known as Mission Hill.

A section of Australians climbed Mission Hill, but found no Japanese there. This hill, which rose almost sheer to a height of a little over a hundred feet, gave a "grandstand" view of the enemy movement and hiding places in the kunai at its base. From this feature the fire and bayonets of the Australians down below were directed effectively, and by 5 p.m. all organised resistance had

ceased and Kaiapit was securely in Australian hands. An official count of the enemy losses was 198 killed. The Australians lost 14 killed and 21 wounded.

By the next day, September 20, the Kaiapit airstrip was in use and transport planes began discharging battalions for the drive into the Ramu Valley.

It was estimated that 500 Japanese fled from Kaiapit. These were chased up the valley, the largest grassland area in New Guinea, which was now open to the 7th Division. From Kaiapit to Dumpu—60 miles—very little enemy opposition was to be encountered. Greatest obstacles were the dangerous crossings of swift rivers flowing from the great Finisterre watershed. Within a few days the whole of 21st Brigade had been flown into Kaiapit, and the drive up the valley toward Dumpu had begun.

The Jap. was now involved—and it was not to his liking—in mobile warfare. An airborne division was something the Japanese had not encountered previously. A senior officer described it as “a third dimensional war,” and added, “If we can’t go around, we just go over the top of the enemy. Air transportation has given us a new flank.”

### **Fight—or Get Out.**

On the flat floor of the valleys, the Jap. was denied his familiar jungle fox-holes and logged pillboxes. It was a case of fighting in the “open” or “getting out.” The Japanese preferred the latter, and by September 23, the 21st Brigade (Brig. I. N. Dougherty), had reached the Umi river. Forward elements were fired on by a Japanese party, which, however, cleared out when the fire was returned. The main enemy force appeared to be withdrawing to Marawasa some twenty-five miles west of Kaiapit, and it seemed likely that this village would be a point of strong opposition.

Crossing of the Umi river, completed on September 25, presented some difficulties. Although not very deep, the stream was nearly 100 feet wide and swift flowing. Engineers got a rope and pulley across, and rubber boats strung end to end and swinging down the stream did the rest. There was no enemy interference.

Contrary to expectations, the enemy made no serious attempt to defend Marawasa, which was occupied on September 29. Several scattered enemy parties were destroyed or dispersed.

The swift thrust had now carried the Australians into the Ramu Valley. A low divide separates the Ramu Valley from the Markham Valley, and the country is so ill-defined that one passes almost imperceptibly from one valley to the other.

While the 21st Brigade was clearing the way to the Gusap river, en route to Dumpu, the 25th Brigade (Brig. K. W. Eather), fresh from the Lae triumph, was being flown in, and was concentrating in the Kaiapit—Umi river area.

No longer air-borne, but reverted to the normal role of “foot-slogging,” the 21st Brigade covered the forty miles between Kaiapit



and the Gusap river, which was crossed near the junction with the Ramu, without meeting organised resistance. There were, however, patrol clashes, and on occasions small parties of Australians ran into Japanese, protected in well established positions, which, although lightly manned, possessed considerable fire-power.

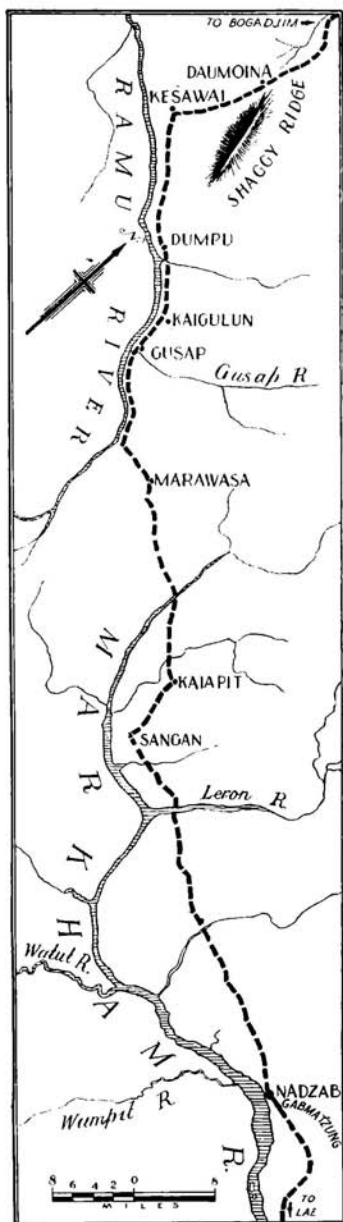
One such clash, at Kaigulan on October 2, resulted in the clearing out of the enemy and was followed by exchanges between patrols. In the latter the Japanese resorted to tactics which Australians first experienced at Milne Bay. A Jap. lying among the dead, aimed his rifle at an Australian, but failed to notice an Australian officer who had just picked up a Japanese sword. Before he could discharge the rifle, the Jap. was decapitated. Another Japanese survivor of one of these clashes chose suicide as an alternative to fighting out the issue. Slipping off his boot he placed a grenade inside it and held the boot to his head.

### More Airfields.

Consolidation at Gusap enabled the rapid development of a new advanced airfield. This field was exploited later by the United States Fifth Air Force to become an important operational air base.

Operations were now well ahead of schedule and Dumpu was occupied without opposition on October 4. The programme of airfield development envisaged by the command five months earlier was further implemented immediately and we soon had a string of airstrips from Tsili Tsili, Bena Bena, Nadzab (quickly to be developed into one of the largest and most important in New Guinea), Kaiapit, Gusap and now Dumpu.

Key to the protection of the new fields was Dumpu, separated from the major enemy bases on the northern coast of New Guinea



by the great Finisterre Ranges, which in parts rose to over 13,000 feet, and over which the Japanese must move if they ever hoped to regain control of the two valleys.

From Bogadjim, on Astrolabe Bay, the Japanese had undertaken construction of a motor road to service the Ramu and Markham valleys. Winding through river valleys the road had reached, at this stage, Yokopi, only 15 air miles from Bogadjim, but many more ground miles. Beyond Yokopi there were only foot tracks, leading to features which were to become of the greatest strategic importance and within a couple of months the scene of bitter fighting. These features included Kankiryo Saddle, the Faria river, and Shaggy Ridge.

### **Japs Dug In Again.**

Although they had offered comparatively slight resistance in the two valleys the Japanese were well established in the Finisterres and, as events proved, were determined to deny us easy access to the north coast bases. Between the Australians and his main defensive positions the Jap. maintained extensive patrols, the presence of which constituted continual threat to the security of Dumpu. The Jap. had had his fill of daylight fighting and generally his patrols were most active at night, but the development of Dumpu was assured by counter patrols, chiefly in the mountains to the north and north-west.

Pushing the Japanese back from the valleys' fringes into the mountain was a formidable task, the Jap. positions being sited along high spurs which commanded all approaches to the narrow defiles.

On October 6—with 21st Brigade in the Dumpu area and 25th Brigade in support in Kaigulan area—the 2/27th Battalion reported the presence of the enemy in some strength in the Uria river area north of Kumbarum,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Dumpu. Over to the east, in the high ground south of the Surinam river, there was another large party of Japs. These were apparently parties which had fled before the Australian advance up the valleys and had made their way through the ranges to reach the main enemy defences and the supply line from Bogadjim. Strong patrols of the 2/33rd Battalion undertook the process of removing the threat which these Japs. represented.

Moving up from the valley, these Australians faced most difficult terrain. It took them eighteen hours to cover five miles, then to be confronted by a long razor-back ridge dominated by three distinct "pimples" each held by the enemy. Frontal assault being impractical because of the terrain, 2/33rd Battalion undertook an outflanking movement. This involved many hours of movement through dense rain forest, but the company engaged reached a position on the enemy's north flank and there began a two-days' fight, the Australians being about 150 feet below the Japs. and 400 yards down the spur held by him. Artillery support for the 2/33rd was



Dumpu, air terminal in the Ramu Valley.

impossible, while the Japs. were backed by mountain guns. Despite his advantage of terrain and arms, the Jap. cleared out again.

While the 2/33rd were thus engaged, the 2/27th Battalion was feeling out in strength into the mountains round Kumbarum. Here, as elsewhere, the Jap. had established himself on all features of tactical value, but he surrendered without a fight the dominating feature of King Hill, 1250 feet above Kumbarum, although the patrols searching him out here comprised only an officer and eight men. He came back later, however.

As in other parts of New Guinea, the terrain was proving almost as great an enemy as the Jap. Patrols from the 2/27th pushing their way to the Finisterres had to cross and re-cross rivers many times, often pushing up-stream against waters swirling through narrow gorges. The Faria river was reached on October 7, and on the following day the 2/27th, concentrated along the river in the vicinity of Guy's Post, was ready to continue the northward drive. The 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions were in immediate support.

Curt official reports of the subsequent actions in this country can convey no real picture of the tremendous difficulties which faced the troops in the area immediately beyond Dumpu.

The Australian role at this stage was not to carry the fight further into enemy-held territory—that was to come later—but for four months there was to be intermittent fighting in the Finisterres in conditions comparable with those met by the troops who fought from Wau to Salamaua—and all of it within a radius of only ten air miles from Dumpu. Even the natives in pre-war days had shunned this country, through which there were few tracks. In many places the jungle was so thick that the Australians could hear men whom they could not see and whom they could not be sure were friends or enemies. The experience of one Australian section in the jungle is typical of that of many others. Climbing a ridge they could hear a man panting as he laboured up the ridge, but they could not see him. When they reached the summit they found the climber was a Jap. As many of his kind were to do later, he panicked at the sight of the Australians and jumped to his death over a 100-ft. cliff. Also indicative of the confusing character of the country was the experience of a battalion commander, who beckoned to a group of men congregated on a point to which he had sent a picquet. They were Japs., who had reached the area ahead of his own party. The Japs. ran.

"Patrol activity" was a term used officially to describe much of the fighting which took place in this area. But this meant, in fact, sudden and frequent encounters between large or small parties of troops usually at close range—for the jungle made it impossible to determine friend from foe at any distance—and with the issue decided in many cases by short range grenade duels or by tommy-gun and bayonet.

Supply difficulties were often a determining factor in these operations. The now well-developed technique of "biscuit bombing" could not be employed because the country was unsuitable for air dropping—even though the troops could see transport planes only six miles away—and we had to revert to the native carrier line, which had served us so well in the 1942 Owen Stanleys campaign.

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## Preliminary Battles

Until we launched the actual battle for Shaggy Ridge—and that was not until late in January—the fighting in this area, from which there was no relief, was aimed in the broad tactical pattern primarily at the protection of Dumpu. Later, as the Jap. was cleared from one commanding position after another the way was opened for the final attack on Shaggy Ridge and the ultimate thrust down to Bogadjim. This involved the destruction of practically the whole of the Japs. encountered in the area. These preliminary actions are exemplified in the accounts of successive attacks on Johns' Knoll, Pallier's Knoll and The Pimple and The Protheros on Shaggy Ridge.

### **Johns' Knoll.**

As the units of the 2/27th Battalion spread out from their base at Guy's Post, the enemy was attempting to crack back and retain the dominating features which would have given him continued command of Dumpu and the Ramu Valley. Some of these attacks were made by small parties, but generally in company strength, although on one occasion the Jap. used what was for this country, the considerable force of a battalion supported by a machine gun company and artillery.

The Jap. brought his artillery into action against the 2/27th during the afternoon of October 10, when some casualties were suffered under the point blank fire of two 75 millimetre guns. One of the new short 25-pounders silenced the mountain gun for a time, but its effectiveness was reduced by the failure of the radio, the only effective means of control in this country. The Jap. guns were in action again on October 11, and when a fighting patrol was unable to reach the enemy's gun positions a laborious process of relaying orders to the twenty-five pounder had to be adopted. The forward artillery observation officer directed his instructions verbally to the battalion intelligence officer, who in turn relayed them verbally to the

battalion commander. The latter, using a small radio set, transmitted the instructions to brigade headquarters, whence they were finally sent back to the gunners by land line. The Jap. countered by switching his guns to alternative positions, which he had prepared in advance.

Before nightfall, however, "B" Company of the 2/27th, in the role of a strong reconnaissance force, had reached higher country to the north, taking five hours to climb two miles.

Using his mountain guns the Jap. launched, early on October 12, a fierce attack aimed at clearing the 2/27th out of Johns' Knoll and Trevor's Ridge. In this attack he employed four companies of infantry and a machine gun company. Johns' Knoll itself was held by only 20 Australians, reinforced later by a platoon. But, before the action was completed, the entire battalion was involved.

### **Supply Lines Cut.**

Coincident with this attack in strength the enemy had carried out an outflanking movement, and had interposed himself between the 2/27th and its base, cutting the supply line. The supply train had run into a strong Jap. force and its escort had not been strong enough to break through, with the result that no supplies reached the 2/27th for two days.

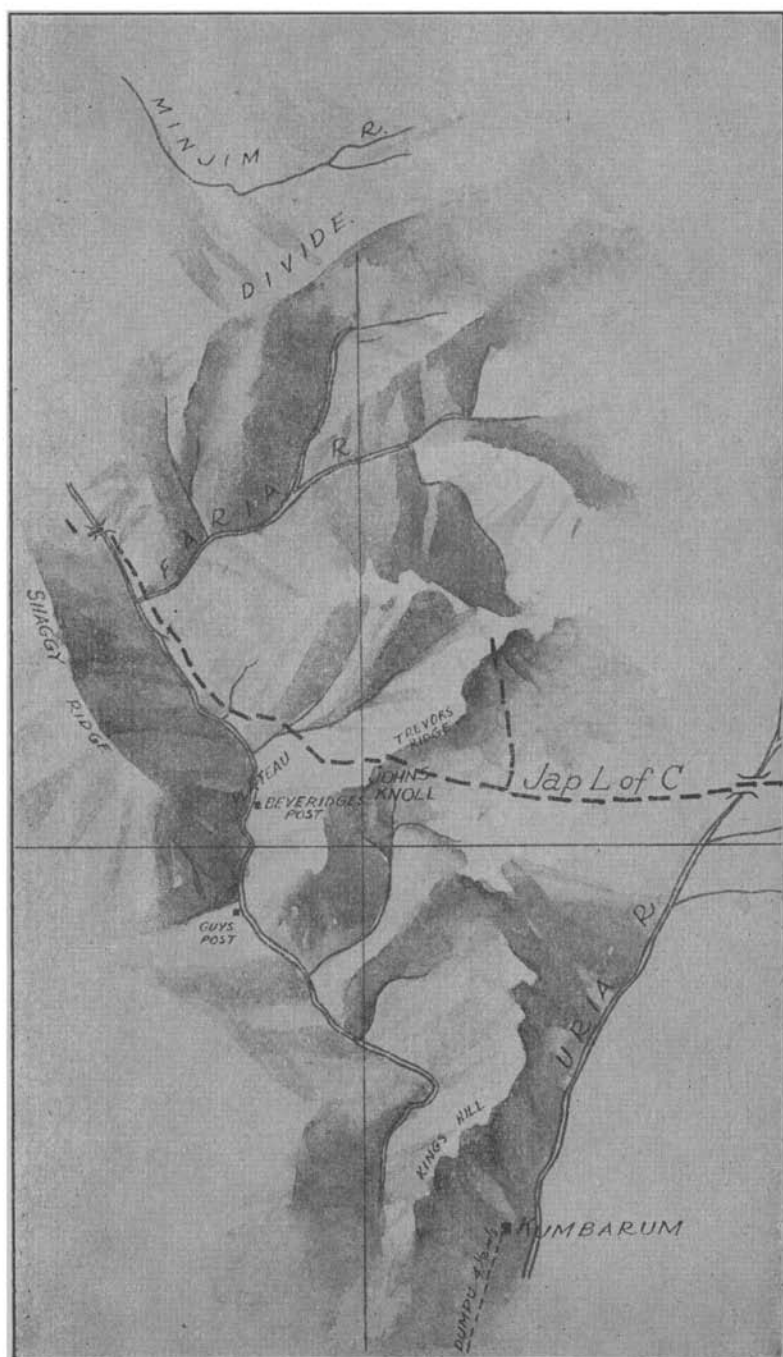
Quickly the entire force was involved in a desperate action against an enemy well established on three sides. Fire from the enemy's mountain guns was directed over the entire area, and even the regimental aid post was shelled. Comparatively safe places for the wounded were difficult to find.

Only eighteen bombs were available for a mortar which was supporting the small party on Johns' Knoll, and twelve of these had been fired when the Japs. got to within 20 yards of the position. The enemy was moving in his mountain guns. Their fire frequently cut the signal line, but it was repaired each time.

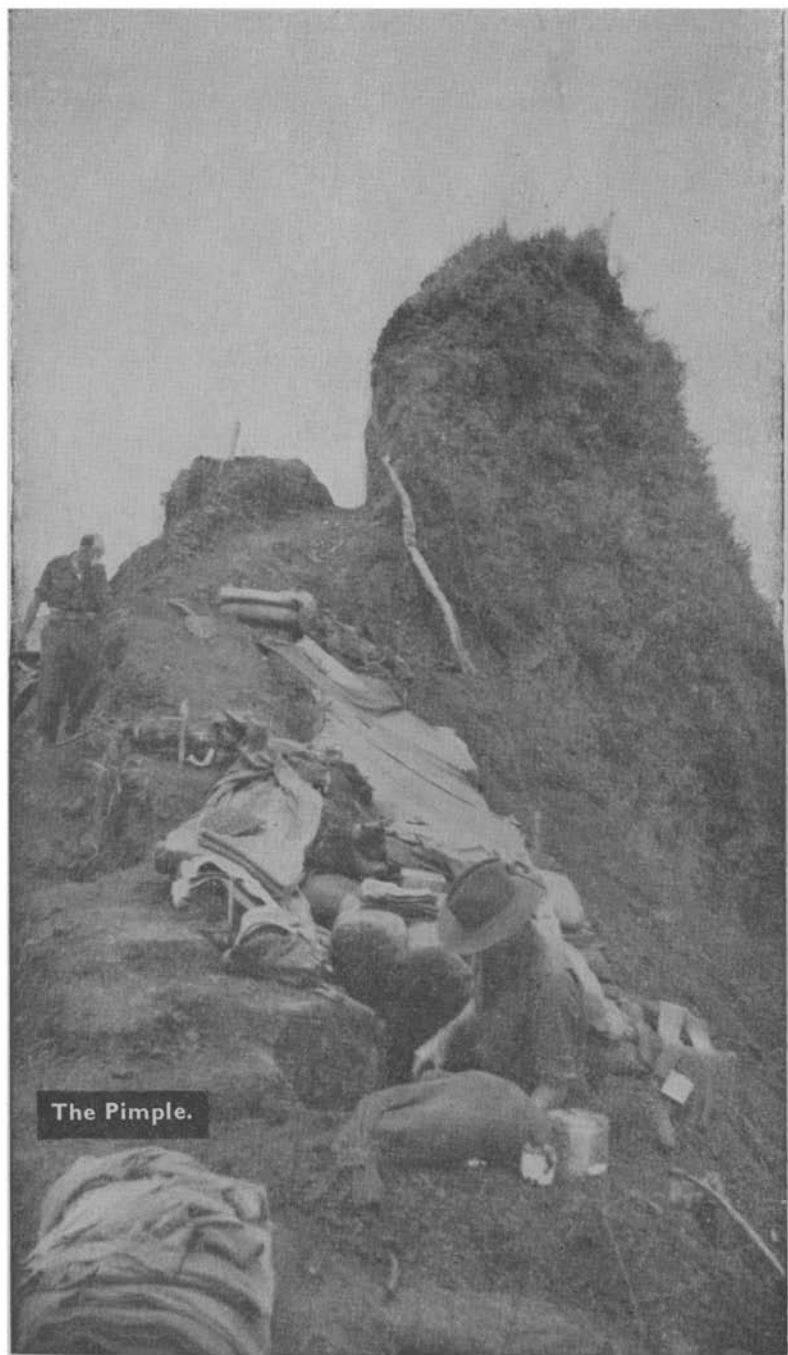
By 1 p.m. the position on Johns' Knoll was desperate, and two platoons were sent out in an encircling movement. They cleared several small ridges and killed 55 Japanese. But now ammunition was running short, and that held by one platoon on Trevor's Ridge and the Headquarters Company had to be drawn upon for the garrison on Johns' Knoll.

The issue was settled when "B" Company, returning from the north to assist the battalion, attacked the enemy's flank. First hint the battalion had of the relief by "B" Company was heavy firing about 6 p.m., and the immediate easing of Japanese pressure. The enemy's attack ceased at nightfall. About 8.30 p.m., several men from "B" Company wormed their way through the enemy's line to reach the battalion, and by 2 a.m. on October 13, two platoons from the company—with ammunition—reached the battalion. Supplies also got through from the rear during the night.

Although the Jap. opened up with mountain guns and machine guns soon after daylight, his infantry did not attack, and his attempt



Area North of Dumpu.



The Pimple.



to retake the knoll was abandoned. A company of 2/14th Battalion came in during the day to support 2/27th in a counter-attack on October 14, but it was found the Japanese had withdrawn overnight, leaving behind at least 140 known dead. The battle was over.

The 2/27th was relieved on October 14 by the 2/16th Battalion.

### **Pallier's Knoll.**

While the 2/27th was involved in the Johns' Knoll attack another action was taking place, on October 12, at Pallier's Knoll, named after an officer who led an Australian attack there. It was a small, but spectacular fight and typical of much of the action which took place from time to time in this area.

The enemy was established on King Hill, overlooking Dumpu, but was driven off by troops of the 2/14th Battalion and retreated along a knife-edged spur, ending abruptly in a dominating knoll. To reach this the Australians had to advance along a narrow path on the extremity of the ridge, with a drop of hundreds of feet on either side. But the Jap. panicked before fixed bayonets. Ten of them jumped off the knoll and were killed by the fall. Some took refuge in fox holes. The whole party of more than 30 was wiped out.

These actions were followed by a period of patrol activity, which lasted for several weeks and which was confined chiefly to the Faria and Shaggy Ridge sectors and northwest along the Ramu River Valley.

The Shaggy Ridge sector began to appear in operational reports after "A" Company of the 2/27th Battalion had gradually established itself on the edge of a 5000 foot ridge rising almost sheer for 2500 feet above Guy's Post plateau. The name was adopted after the company had established itself on the south-eastern extremity of this eight-mile ridge. "Shaggy" was the nickname of the Australian officer who commanded the original defensive positions there.

Clashes were numerous and bloody. Pulling himself together after his rapid exodus from the valleys, the Jap. clung tenaciously to salient physical features which protected his vital track to the coast. Greater use of artillery was made by both sides.

Generally, now, the Jap. was preferring death to surrender. Many gave away their lives senselessly and without exacting a price. Records of this phase of the campaign show a number of occasions on which, singly or in groups, the enemy leaped over precipices to death, often when he could have fought back.

But the Jap. was incalculable. On one occasion, for instance, three Japanese turned their backs on attacking Australians and threw grenades haphazardly over their shoulders. They were shot. Elsewhere, another Jap. feigned death by lying among the bodies of his compatriots. As a cautious Australian, with a sub-machine gun ready, turned over the bodies, the Jap. sat upright, raised his hands, and called, "No shoot! No shoot!"

Throughout this "patrol period" repeated aerial attacks were made against the enemy's communications with Bogadjim. The numerous bridges which carried the motor road out from Bogadjim were particular objects of attack, but damage always was repaired quickly.

### **Kesawai Attack.**

Early in December, the enemy accelerated the tempo of his patrol activity in the north-west—along the valley near Kesawai, some 10 miles from Dumpu.

Here we had maintained the 2/6th Cavalry (Commando) Squadron, members of which patrolled deeply into enemy-held territory. Headquarters of this squadron, surrounded by the enemy, fought its way out. Other screening posts were also attacked, but the Jap. did not challenge the main Australian force around Kesawai. He did, however, fight doggedly in his assaults against the outposts.

Probing into the general Kesawai area, the Jap. attacked a thinly-held Australian outpost at 1.15 a.m. on December 13, but withdrew after a fight which lasted three-quarters of an hour. Fifteen minutes later he returned with a medium machine-gun, which he set up within 30 yards of the post. Under cover of its fire, and supported by mortar and grenade bombardment, he attacked again for 40 minutes—and again withdrew.

In the face of a third and even more determined attack, and threatened with encirclement, the Australian party retired to a better defensive position. But the Jap did not follow through. The only possible explanation of his failure to do so could have been the heavy losses inflicted on him. The Australians lost 12 killed; the Japs. more than 100.

Six hundred Japanese paid heavily for an attack against commandos in the Solu river area, and the enemy did not maintain his show of offensive spirit.

**M**eanwhile, strongly established in a natural defensive position, the enemy had, since he was driven into the mountains in October, been able to resist any advance beyond a feature of Shaggy Ridge known as The Pimple.

Located about half-way along the crest of Shaggy Ridge, The Pimple, a rocky tor rising almost perpendicularly from the spur, dominated the forward Australian positions. It could be reduced only by frontal attack, and the approach along the top of the spur was wide enough for only one man to move at a time. Capped most of the time by mist, The Pimple was more often than not just a blurred shape behind heavy rain clouds.

Possession of this position would not only enable Australian artillery fire to be directed accurately, instead of haphazardly, against the enemy's lines of communication, but it would also deny him observation of all our movements in the vicinity of our most forward base in the valley.

For more than two months patrols reconnoitred constantly the terrain round the ridge in an effort to discover means of getting behind the Jap. position. None could be found, and the patrols became involved in bitter and bloody skirmishings with occupants of subsidiary enemy posts.

With enemy strength behind The Pimple unknown, and no alternative having been found, a frontal assault was planned for the morning of December 27—a co-ordinated assault by infantry, artillery and aeroplanes. Artillery opened up at 8 a.m. against The Pimple and "Rock Face," as the steep slope leading to it was known. When the guns ceased, R.A.A.F. Boomerangs and American Kittyhawks attacked. Tracer bullets from the Boomerangs directed the dive bombers to the target, and the whole of Shaggy Ridge

seemed to tremble under the impact of the bombs. Seventy-five per cent. of the bombs fell in the target area—extremely good work considering the difficult nature of the target.

As the last of the Kittyhawks pulled out, the artillery opened up again in earnest. The bombardment was heavier than anything they had given the Japs. before, and they pounded The Pimple, its front, rear and sides.

When the artillery relaxed, the Kittyhawks came in again, sweeping the ridge with devastating machine-gun fire, and as the planes withdrew the artillery began their final task. The hammering went on for half an hour—in point of time and having regard to the limited area, the heaviest artillery assault that had been launched against a single Japanese position.

Meanwhile, the infantry had been lining up under cover of the rain forest opposite "Rock Face," now denuded by artillery fire of every vestige of jungle growth.

### **Cliff—Climbing Attack.**

"Zero!" and as the artillery lifted, the infantry began the 500 yards ascent up the blasted slope. It was hand and foot going, for improvised ladders had to be discarded because there was no holding on the splintered and shattered shale.

Deep down in the Faria River valley a diversionary attack was made; the artillery lifted again to batter the enemy supports behind The Pimple; overhead Boomerangs searched the ridge for opportunity targets. So the infantry got through.

The Jap. on The Pimple had been demoralised. Early in the attack his ack-ack had been fairly heavy, but it did not survive the strafing. Behind The Pimple, however, the enemy was active, and as the infantry clambered up the rock they met strong opposition. The planes and the artillery had done their best, but there were still pockets to be cleaned out, and ingenuity had to be called upon to complete the job.

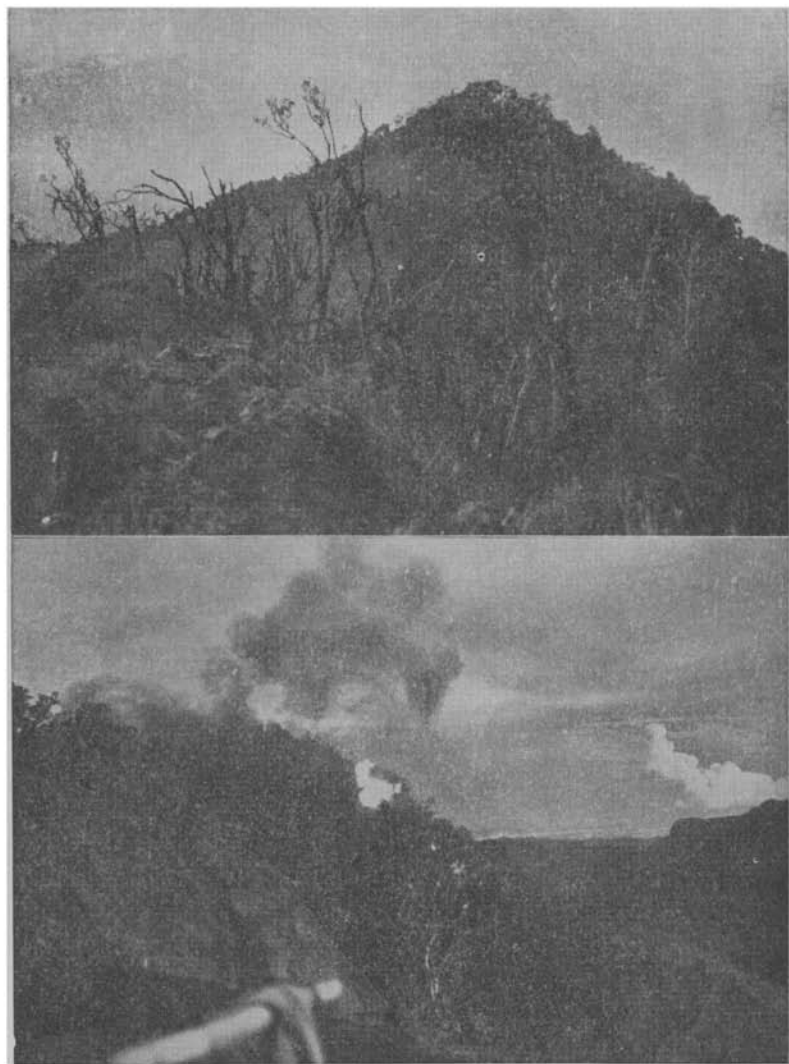
Jap. occupants of one weapon pit had covered the opening with a rubber ground sheet, and as grenades were thrown on to it they were dexterously flicked away before they could explode. Final counter was a grenade tied to the end of a bamboo pole, which was thrust into the pit, the pin being pulled out by a length of string.

Most determined enemy resistance came from a pill-box, which threatened to hold up the advance. At 10.39 a.m., headquarters received from The Pimple a signal reading: "Well and truly held up by a rock-made bunker. Three men who charged it with grenades and bayonets have been wounded. But we have got The Pimple and can hold it."

A sheer drop flanked the pill-box on each side. The enemy within were protected from the Australian fire by a shelter of logs and stones, and were equipped with small arms and automatic weapons. More than 100 grenades were thrown at them during the day, but without effect.

The engineers helped out. Back in the valley, they designed a special bomb for the occasion. It consisted of a grenade placed in a chemical and sealed in a field ration tin, with a piece of lace attached to the grenade pin hanging outside.

While the engineers worked on these, pioneer members of the attacking unit chiselled a track along the cliff face toward the pillbox. They were protected from the fire of the weapons above by the



The Pimple was the first step toward Shaggy Ridge.  
Bombers blasted enemy positions.

angle of the cliff, and were supported by their mates who hurled grenades and kept up a continuous fire at the enemy opposite. All night these men worked, relieving each other on the narrow ledge until the path was level with, and just below, the bunkered Japanese position. During the night, too, the troops who had taken part in the initial fighting during the day, were withdrawn and replaced by fresh men. At first light they went into action. Men on the newly cut ledges below, and from the front, pulled grenade strings and hurled the new bombs. Explosion of the grenades in the tins ignited the chemical.

The pillbox vanished.

A Jap. officer and private were found in the pillbox. Of all the dugouts and foxholes on The Pimple, it was the only one that did not have communicating trenches with the others.

The Australians gained 1000 yards that day, and pushed the Jap. right off The Pimple. They withstood a determined enemy counter-attack.

By no means a major battle, the action fought on Shaggy Ridge was most important. The Pimple, defiant for over two months, was captured in a little over two hours.

Capture of The Pimple, although it deprived the Japanese of a most important observation point, did not drive the enemy from Shaggy Ridge. So long as the enemy held the northern half of the ridge, it was necessary for the Australians to deploy considerable forces on and around the southern extremity to meet a possible move in force from Shaggy Ridge itself, or from his left flank along Faria river valley.

As communications from the Ramu Valley extended through undeveloped country, supply became an increasingly acute problem, which at all times conditioned even the most limited operations. Construction of a "jeep-able" track to forward positions on Shaggy Ridge from the Ramu Valley, if not impossible, was at least a major engineering task. Nevertheless, engineers did build a jeep track from the Dumpu airfield almost to the base of the steep Shaggy Ridge gradient. This track, which followed the crest of the kunai-covered ridges known as the foothills of the Finisterre mountains, was a monument to ingenuity and hard work. It provided an easy way of getting supplies half-way. At its terminus, where the long lines of native carriers picked up their loads, the hard way began, and followed devious muddy tracks along and across difficult water-courses, and up the almost sheer and slippery slopes which made up this fantastic battle-ground.

The Jap., on the other hand, had a good track extending from Bogadjim on the coast almost as far as Kankiryo, just at the rear of his positions on Shaggy Ridge.

Kankiryo was vital to the Japanese not only because it was the only advanced supply point for Shaggy Ridge operations, but also the pivot of enemy deployment around this sector. The enemy were extremely sensitive and always reacted violently to any Australian move toward Kankiryo along the Faria river on the left flank of Shaggy Ridge.







Occupation of Kankiryo by Australian troops would end any aspirations the Japanese might have had for a reconquest of the Ramu and Markham Valleys. At the same time, because of its peculiar geographical situation, its occupation would lessen the number of Australian troops needed to be deployed to hold the Valley's approaches. The task was allotted to 18th. Brigade (Brig. F. O. Chilton).

Early in January preparation began for an attack on Kankiryo which was to involve the destruction of all Japanese forces before it. There were only three practicable approaches. Two were on the existing fronts—Shaggy Ridge and the right flank along the Faria River valley. The third was a wide encircling movement on the left flank of Shaggy Ridge, via the Mene River valley, and to direct the main attack on twin mountain features known as Prothero I and Prothero II, which dominated both Kankiryo Saddle and the northern end of the Japanese dispositions on Shaggy Ridge.

### **Enemy Relied on Terrain.**

Disadvantages of frontal attacks along Shaggy Ridge or the Faria valley were that either could be expected to encounter a series of localities well-defended in depth along the ridges, and if the forward ridges were successfully cleared, the enemy might be driven back into naturally strong positions around Kankiryo. Such an event would have given the Australians occupation of strategically valueless ground at the expense of extended and difficult supply lines.

In recent weeks there had been noted a considerable slackening of enemy patrol activity in the area through which the left flank attack could be made. This was taken to indicate Japanese belief that no sizeable force could overcome the natural obstacles and difficulties of the approach and then mount a successful attack up the steep western face of Shaggy Ridge.

If such were their belief, the Japanese certainly had much to support it. The area is one of swift-flowing mountain streams, dense and sodden rain forest, and almost vertical mountain sides.

An earlier patrol had, however, found an approach along a steep razor-backed spur to within a short distance of the summit, where sounds of the enemy were heard. Special patrols were sent to obtain further information, but another patrol located an alternative and less rugged approach. This followed the bed of the Mene River to a feature known as Canning Saddle, which was suitable for assembly area.

Whether it was possible to move a battalion of troops by this left flank route for concentration in the Canning Saddle area without enemy observation, and whether the force could be maintained and supplied until a shorter line of communication along Shaggy Ridge could be cleared, were major problems for the command.

Seventh Division's theory is that nothing is impassable or impossible, so it was decided to attack the Protheros from the Mene River valley and to combine it with weighty—though strategically less important—thrusts on Shaggy Ridge and along the

Faria River valley. It was to be a three-pronged attack, with the outcome mainly, if not entirely, dependent on the success of the Protheros attack.

### **"Cut-throat" Assault**

The operation was given the imaginative code name of "Cut-throat," as indeed it was. Capture of the Protheros would give the Australians command of Kankiryo, and by thus severing communications, would bottle up the Japs on Shaggy Ridge.

"D" Day was Thursday, January 20, 1944, and a programme of air-strikes was organised to take place prior to and during the attack, to soften the enemy defences and cover the concentration of attacking battalions. All available 25-pounders were to be thrown into support and forward artillery observation officers were attached to the attacking infantry companies to ensure that accurate fire was at all times available at the closest range.

Other preparations included extension of the jeep track from Dumpu to Guy's Post, and the grading, draining and general improvement of foot tracks. A new track was cut to Canning Saddle, protective screens being used to prevent enemy patrols observing construction.

Three days before "D" day the aerial bombardment began. Allied heavy and medium bombers struck heavily at Japanese forward and rear positions, and dive-bombers bombed and strafed selected targets. The air attack was the greatest employed in New Guinea in direct support of Australian infantry. Many thousands of rounds were fired in support by 25-pounders.

On "D day minus one," the 2/10th Battalion moved forward on the Faria River Valley flank and occupied Sproggs' Ridge without meeting opposition, but enemy patrols were located on the centre of Cams's Saddle, the next day's objective. The 2/12th Battalion began at the same time its approach toward Canning Saddle, assembly area for the attack on the Protheros.

That night torrential rains, followed by a cloud-burst, deluged the whole area. One river rose six feet in an hour, destroying a network of bridges and tracks laboriously built in many weeks. The Damour bridge (so named after a scene of bitter fighting by the 7th Division in Syria) was swept away, severing jeep communications between Dumpu and Guy's Post. The Mene River banked up behind the bridge wreckage and changed course. Landslides ripped out signal lines.

With so much depending on their efforts, engineers began immediately to provide makeshift trafficable bridges and tracks, and signalmen did splendid work in keeping open the tenuous system of communications.

The 2/12th Battalion had nevertheless reached Canning Saddle and were concentrating for the attack on the Protheros area at first light the next morning. The flooded Mene River had added

tremendously to the difficulties of their trek through the forest and the troops were staggering with fatigue and drenched to the skin when they arrived. It was a cheerless night; no fires could be lit, and the troops were without blankets and shelter because ammunition and rations were first priority when they set out.

The 2/12th's programme for "D" day provided for a silent attack, with one company moving up a steep razorback ridge, the only possible approach to Prothero I. A second company was to pass through and secure the Saddle between Prothero I and Prothero II, and a third company was to secure the northern slopes of Prothero I. Companies of a Pioneer Battalion were assigned the task of protecting the left flank by seizing the western approaches to Prothero I and holding Canning Saddle. A programme of artillery concentrations in close support had been prepared, but it was to be used only if the surprise element of the attack were lost.

### **Battle of The Razor-Backs.**

Early next morning, this force made its way up the precipitous, jungle-covered western face of Shaggy Ridge. In many places ropes had to be used to drag the attackers up the almost perpendicular slopes. The initial attack took the enemy completely by surprise, but when the attackers were about 100 yards from the summit contact was made with a party of Japs. who had prepared a large demolition charge on the razor back. The enemy, taken by surprise, failed to blow the charge, but gave warning to troops further up the slope.

A 75 mm. gun which had been firing on Australian forward positions on Shaggy Ridge was immediately swung round to engage the forward elements of the 2/12th Battalion at close range. The gun, firing at point blank range, sent shells bursting among the tree tops, scattered shrapnel over a wide area, and caused a number of casualties among the Australians. This fire was directed at an advance on a two-man front, yet the attack was pressed.

To relieve the main body, a subsidiary attack was made against the Japanese gun position. Frontal assault being impossible, the position was surrounded gradually, but an almost sheer ridge had to be scaled in doing so. Then the gun position was rushed. Foremost in the push toward the gun emplacement was a bren gunner. He leapt from an embankment overlooking the gun, and, falling on his stomach within six feet of the entrance, simultaneously opened fire. He then rolled on his side and engaged a medium machine gun which was firing from the pill box on the flank of the gun position, killing and wounding its occupants. This enabled the Australians to advance within grenade range. The gun was still firing as they closed in, hurling grenades at the Japanese. The whole crew of 16 was killed, and the enemy was driven off Prothero I with heavy casualties. The field gun, an almost new piece, was captured intact. With it, in the securely revetted and camouflaged pit, were several hundred rounds of ammunition, artificer's tools, and stores.

Consolidation on  
Shaggy Ridge.



Making the most of their success, the Australians pressed southward along the crest of the ridge toward Prothero II, aiming directly at the rear of the main enemy forces on Shaggy Ridge.

### **Shaggy Ridge.**

Simultaneously with the Prothero attack the 2/9th Battalion launched an attack on the main Shaggy Ridge front, where the main weight of aerial and artillery support had for several days been pounding Japanese positions.

Their objective was a dominating eminence known as Green Sniper's Pimple. It was in front of this feature that the Australian advance, after the capture of The Pimple in December, had halted. The enemy was well dug in, supported by machine guns and he was able to bring direct mortar and artillery fire to bear over the narrow one-man approach. The attack was launched immediately after a dive-bombing strike on enemy positions. The bitter fighting which followed was characterised by close range grenade duels.

One platoon gained possession of Green Sniper's Pimple, but shelling inflicted casualties and forced a withdrawal. This left another forward platoon open to attack from the flank. Another platoon was sent into the attack along the narrow two-feet wide crest of the ridge, and Green Sniper's Pimple was taken again.

Capture of this objective, which represented an advance of only 100 yards for the day, gave the Australians command of the whole area. The Jap. counter-attacked repeatedly, but each time was beaten back with severe casualties.

Resuming their attack against the western end of Cam's Saddle, where their advance had been held up on the previous day, the Australians found the enemy had evacuated the west end of the saddle. This probably was due to the brisk shelling of the area by 25-pounders at first light, when some 240 shells were put down in a very small area in less than five minutes.

When the Jap. moved off, he left a small detachment which worked its way down to the Australian rear and ambushed a party of maintenance signallers.

Pushing forward, the Australians attacked along Faria Ridge, which runs roughly parallel to and east of Shaggy Ridge. Heavy rain again made the advance difficult and increased supply problems. To replace washed-away bridges, sappers hauled big logs across the rapids and along these the natives passed with their loads of mortar bombs, rations and stores.

By the end of the day, after taking a heavily defended post on Faria Ridge, the 2/10th Battalion was in contact with the Japanese about 600 yards along the ridge. "D day plus one" brought, therefore, a marked change in perspective. The main enemy force on Shaggy Ridge was caught between advancing Australians—one force in their rear from Prothero and the other on Shaggy Ridge. Moreover, their forces in the Faria River valley were fighting, not so

much to halt the Australian drive, as to maintain their own existence as a fighting force. On the razor back the Japanese now held only about a mile of ground, and the perimeter was slowly, but relentlessly being squeezed in.

### **Japs. Break in Panic**

"D day plus two" saw vigorous resumption of aggression by the three Australian forces. The Prothero force, following a successful divebombing raid by Kittyhawks and under covering fire of 25-pounders, pushed on and captured their objective—the mountain peak Prothero II, directly at the rear of Japanese forward positions on Shaggy Ridge. The enemy in this area had made very little provision to meet an attack from the west, but hastily diverted forces fought desperately to halt the Australian drive and for a time Australian forward elements were held up by medium machine gun fire and snipers hidden in the trees. Ultimately the Jap. broke and fled in panic, abandoning small arms and other weapons in haste to fall back to the rear of their Shaggy Ridge positions.

Heaviest Australian pressure, however, came from the central or Shaggy Ridge sector. After capturing Green Sniper's Pimple, the enemy took up positions on McCaughey's Knoll, another eminence on the ridge. A company, covered by artillery fire, and with supporting fire from the newly-won positions, on Green Sniper's Pimple, moved down the precipitous and thickly wooded western slopes to attack the enemy's right flank. After hacking their way through the thick growth for nearly two hours, they advanced to within 40 yards of the crest. Again the enemy had undoubtedly placed too much reliance on what he thought was impassable terrain.

In the face of heavy fire, McCaughey's Knoll was assaulted. A Japanese sniper caused a temporary delay, but a burst of fire from a Bren gun sent him tumbling from his tree top. From another post, Japanese gunners, using light and medium machine guns, fired without cessation in an endeavour to halt the Australian advance. A small detachment of Australians crawled forward to within 30 yards of the position and blasted it into silence with automatic fire and grenades.

One infantryman was killed when he fell from the ridge. He had bayoneted a Japanese, but he was unable to withdraw his bayonet before he was attacked by a second Japanese. He was seen to come to grips with the Japanese on the edge of the precipice, and both disappeared over the edge.

McCaughey's Knoll was taken, and by nightfall the forward elements of this force and the force coming in to the Japanese rear from the Protheros were only 900 yards apart. Both forces were, however, held up by machine gun fire and shelling from field guns located around Kankiryo and along the Mintjim River.

Fighting continued throughout the night, the Japanese repeatedly counter-attacking, but without success.



During the night, one Queenslander had an experience which illustrated the hand-to-hand nature of the fighting. A Japanese, apparently under the impression that he was still among friends, jumped into a weapon pit. Pinned to the muddy bottom, the Australian was unable to extricate his Owen gun which was beneath him. He grappled with the Jap., who broke away and leapt into another Australian post nearby. The Queenslander followed quickly, but soon found that he was struggling with one of his own sergeants. The Japanese escaped.

The Jap. on Shaggy Ridge was now completely bottled up, and had no alternative to fighting it out. Some attempted to escape down the steep, kunai-covered eastern slope to the Faria River, but machine gunners quickly accounted for them. A detachment of the Prothero force had also swung left along the ridge to reach Kankiryo Saddle. Only light opposition was met, but it was quickly overcome. This served to cut the only possible line of retreat for the Japanese force fighting along the Faria River.

Counter-attacks against the 2/9th Battalion having failed, the Japanese on the same night made a desperate attempt to escape from Shaggy Ridge through the Prothero Force, which stood between the rear of the Japanese positions and his supply point of Kankiryo. But the Prothero force was too firmly entrenched and the trap closed in. Early in the morning of January 23, the 2/9th Battalion carried out a series of minor outflanking attacks along Shaggy Ridge, and the remaining enemy was completely destroyed. Many Japanese jumped to death over the sheer ridge.

The battle for Shaggy Ridge had been won.

### **Crater Pimple.**

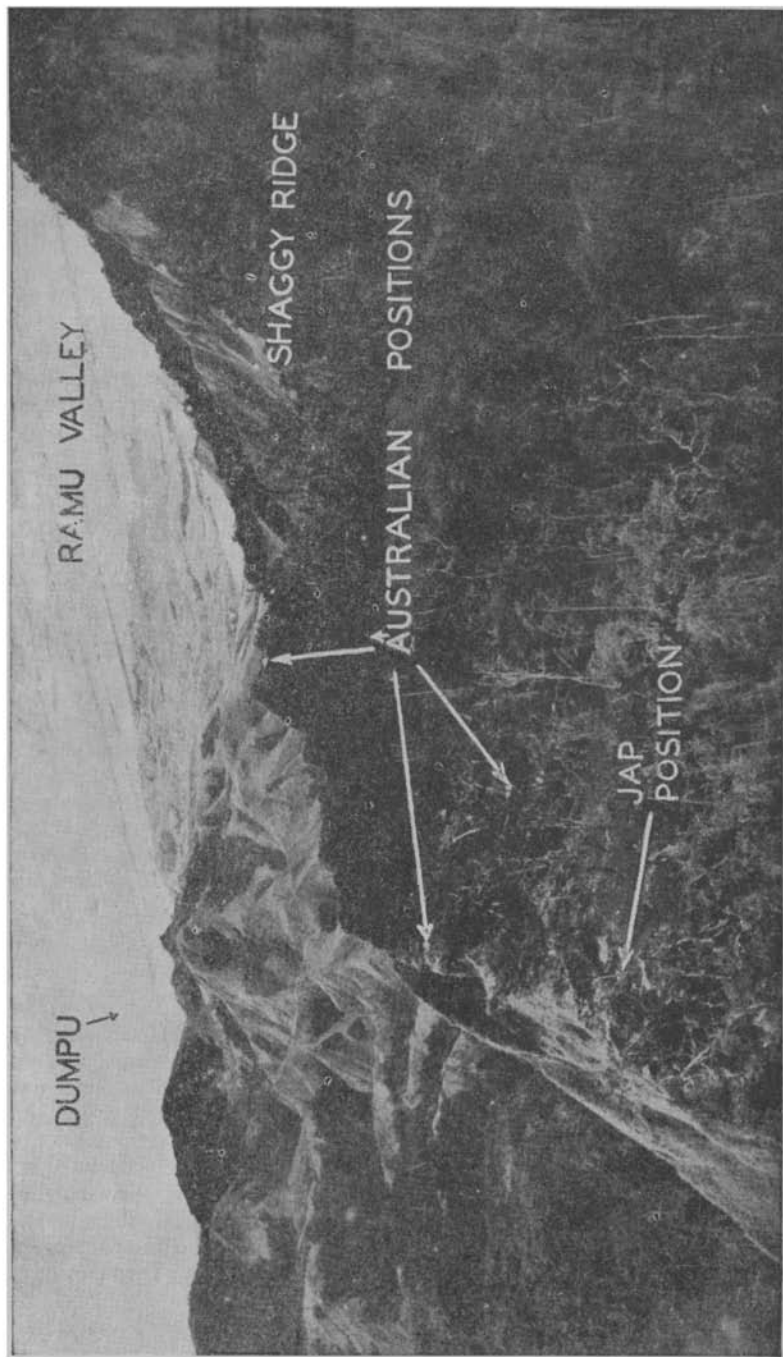
All that remained now of the Japanese forces before Kankiryo were the remnants of the force opposing the 2/10th Battalion's drive along the Faria Ridge, running roughly parallel to Shaggy Ridge. Its communications with the coast also ran through Kankiryo.

As Australian troops were in possession of Kankiryo, the Japs. on Faria Ridge were threatened with the same fate as their compatriots on Shaggy Ridge. They were being driven back from the southern end and Australian troops were advancing on their rear from the northern end.

Under threat of encirclement, the Jap. withdrew his main forces from the extensive locality of Faria Ridge up the spur of a feature known as "4100," about a mile north-east of Kankiryo, which apparently was the regimental headquarters area. During the morning of January 24, Australians from Kankiryo attempted to advance up the southern slopes of "4100," from which the enemy had withdrawn on the previous day, but the Japanese had re-occupied it and an attempt to retake it failed.

Meanwhile, overcoming rearguard opposition, 2/10th Battalion regained contact with the main Japanese force on the south-eastern





slope of "4100." A fighting patrol of 2/12th Battalion also pushed along the main Japanese track from Kankiryo toward the coast, inflicted casualties on isolated Japanese parties and captured a 75 mm gun, a 20 mm dual purpose gun, and large quantities of supplies. Elsewhere around Kankiryo a few isolated pockets of the enemy were cleaned out.

No progress was made against the Japanese positions on feature "4100," on the next day, January 25, but a patrol of the 2/10th Battalion, pushing along a mule track skirting the Faria River made contact with the 2/12th Battalion at Kankiryo. The 2/9th Bn. was then ordered to carry out a wide outflanking movement, passing through Kankiryo from Shaggy Ridge and crossing the end of the Mintjim Valley to come in from the enemy's right flank. They caught the enemy unawares, drove him from the summit of "4100" to a position lower down the slope, where the Japanese grouped on an eminence against which three thickly-timbered spurs converged. It was named "Crater Pimple," because a dive-bombing attack had cratered it with a 500-lb. bomb.

### **Aircraft Eyes.**

For a while it was extremely difficult to determine the relative positions of the three attacking Australian groups and the exact nature of the ground held by the enemy. The relative positions of attacker and attacked was established later by aircraft observation of mortar flares fired by the several advanced Australian detachments.

The enemy, although virtually surrounded, was prepared to fight it out to a desperate finish. It was obvious to the Australian command that an all-out attack against this strong position might well prove costly in view of the exceptionally difficult ground, the well-prepared defences, which included bunkers, and the large number of automatic weapons sited by the enemy. It was decided, therefore, to adopt "siege" methods, and a programme of artillery, bombing and mortar concentrations was arranged to soften the position for a future assault.

Contact was maintained to ensure that there was no undetected withdrawal into the rough country to the north.

Siege tactics ended on January 29, when, preceded by heavy artillery concentrations and dive bombing, the Australians made a number of strong probing attacks under cover of machine gun fire. The Japanese met the attack with savage fire and foiled any attempt to penetrate their positions. The engagement had to be broken off, and another attack on the positions two days later was only partly successful. On the right flank the enemy was initially overwhelmed in an attack which carried the Australians forward 600 yards to the base of a steep rock face within a hundred yards of the summit of Crater Pimple. But the exceptionally difficult terrain defeated an attempt to press the attack right through. Two counter-attacks, however, were beaten off.

A four-day siege ended on February 1, when Australian forces moved up the steep rock faces from three sides and entered the enemy positions without opposition. The previous day's dive-bombing attack by American-manned Kittyhawks coupled with a night of heavy artillery concentration had completely devastated the area, crushing enemy resistance; a few survivors apparently escaped into the rough "futureless" country to the east.

The Japanese positions presented a grim sight. Many dead were lying in and around shell craters. There were several common graves and a number of dead had been hastily buried beneath the floor of several communication trenches. It was evident that the Japanese anticipated a long siege. Deep dugouts and logged bunkers were connected by a maze of communication trenches, all built with great care. Nearby was an abandoned 70 mm. gun and another was unearthed later. Large stores of ration and ammunition were scattered about the posts.

### COMMANDO SQUADRONS.

This necessarily summarised record of Australian operations in the Markham and Ramu Valleys, has omitted more than general reference to the important work throughout the area of the commando squadrons. Their record is a separate story.

These commandos are not commandos in the generally accepted sense that their activities are entirely independent of the operations of the main force. Australian commando squadrons operate usually in conjunction with a main force, for which they are the "eyes" and screen. They operate far in advance, patrolling actively for information, reconnoitring native and enemy tracks, raiding and destroying enemy outposts, and harassing and dislocating enemy lines of communication.

They are trained to live and act independently. They learn how to use enemy weapons as well as the full range of their own. They are taught to live off the land. They are also trained to fight as a composite body. It was, for instance, a commando squadron (the 2/6th) which was responsible for the capture of Kaiapit.

Typical of the operations of these squadrons is an "incident" which occurred in the Ramu Valley a week before the arrival there of the main Australian force.

It was the task of a patrol of the 2/2nd Commando Squadron to move in from the direction of Bena Bena to Kesawai, which was at the end of a Japanese track leading over the mountains from Bogadjim. A patrol (18 strong) arrived at the Ramu River about 10 p.m. on September 28. Leaving three to act as a covering force, fifteen crossed the Ramu at midnight, the swiftly-flowing river lapping

just under their chins. Carrying their equipment on top of their heads, they grasped a frail signal wire to help them through the swirling river. At 5 a.m. on September 29 they closed in on Kesawai to find it deserted. They decided to push up the track toward Bogadjim in search of the fugitives.

Two men then went on deliberately to draw the Japanese fire. Exposed to danger all the way, they had covered almost a mile up the track when, on a kunai flat, they were fired on at fifty yards' range by two Japanese with a light machine gun. Neither was hit. They returned the fire and "got out." Convinced that this would "draw the crabs" the Australians industriously began stamping the grass flat to give the impression that a large force had passed by. Then they waited for the Japanese. Two hours later the Japanese began to drive—in fours and fives—with a screen of natives, carrying bows and arrows, acting as scouts in front.

The Australians had the entire area surrounded and had the track in perfect view. They saw the natives halt and point to the trampled grass. This brought the Japanese into a bunch. The Australians waited until there were 50 Japanese bunched together and about 100 in sight. Then the leader of the party leapt on to the track and opened fire. Simultaneously, a hail of bullets from other members of the party raked the Japanese. The force had nine Owen guns and two Brens and every man fired at least six magazines. This "raid" cost the enemy 45 known killed and many others wounded. Australian losses were one killed and one wounded.

# ROUT COMPLETED

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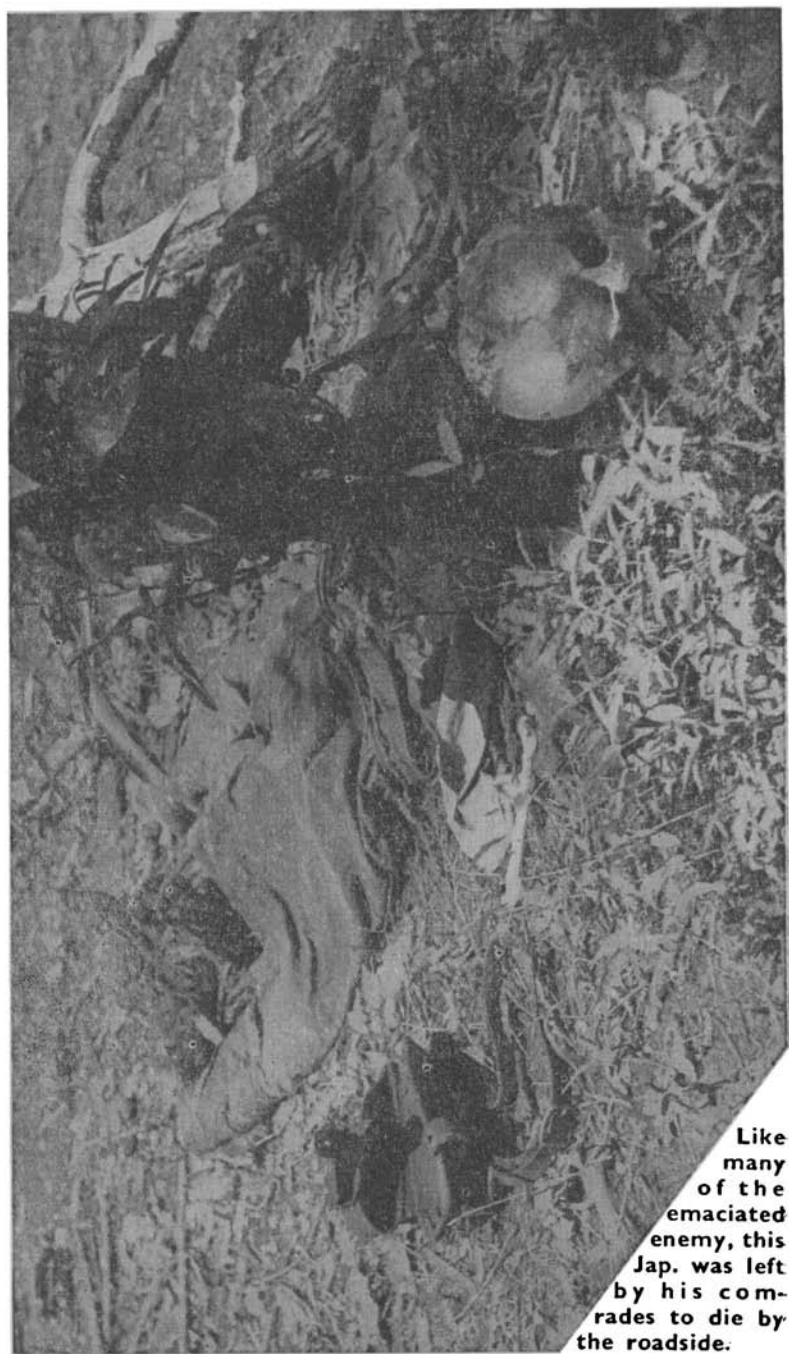
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SIO - SAIDOR

BOGADJIM - MADANG

ALEXISHAFEN - HANSA BAY

*January 25th — June 14th, 1944*



Like many of the emaciated enemy, this Jap. was left by his comrades to die by the roadside.

**S**UCCESSFUL maintenance of supplies and communications rather than strenuous hand-to-hand fighting were the decisive factors in 8th Brigade's (Brig. C. E. Cameron) speedy chase of the remnants of Japan's 20th Division along the Rai Coast.

Organised Jap. resistance had been broken by the 9th Division in the earlier decisive battles at Finschhafen, Sattelberg and Wareo, and their morale was shattered in the ensuing retreat along the Peninsula. The Japs. had passed beyond Sio when the 5th Division (Maj.-Gen. A. H. Ramsay) took over operations. This formation's role was to drive the Japs. from Sio Mission along the Rai Coast until the Australians linked up with troops of U.S. 32nd Division, who had by-passed the Australians and established a 13-mile perimeter at Saidor.

Roles allotted to the battalions were:—4th Battalion, Sio Mission to Crossingtown, a distance of 28 miles; 30th Battalion, Crossingtown to Sel, 40 miles; and 35th Battalion, the mountain trails from the coast at Gali 2, Malalamaito and Wandiluk, 15 miles inland. The 35th Battalion's role was designed to close the difficult route through the Finisterre Ranges along which the Japs. were forced in order to by-pass Saidor. A company of the Papuan Infantry Battalion was placed under command of the 8th Brigade, and given an independent reconnaissance role.

When the 4th Battalion took up the pursuit from Sio Mission on January 25, the Jap. rearguard had already gained a three days' start. Isolated parties of Japs., too sick to keep up with them, covered the retreat along the narrow coastal track.

### Heavy Country.

Reckoned by air miles, the distance that had to be covered by the Brigade from Sio to Saidor was about 60 miles only. Before

their task was completed the infantry had covered almost 100 track miles—long stretches of marsh, kunai grass and jungle intersected by more than 100 rivers and streams, many of them uncharted and unnamed. In this stretch of New Guinea, kunai-covered swamp country extends from Sio to Wasu, cut by the normally sluggish and meandering Kwama River. Then the character changes to a narrow fringe of thick jungle hugging the coastline, with a short belt of kunai plain rising less than two miles inland to kunai and jungle-covered foothills of the Bismarck and Finisterre Mountains. Their peaks and razor-like edges are almost always shrouded by heavy rain clouds and mist. Those jungle-covered spurs often came right down to the sea.

The monsoon period was at its height when the advance began. Sluggish rivers became raging torrents, damp tracks became veritable quagmires, and the heavy rain lashed the plodding troops, keeping them in a state of continual wet. The Jap., in his retreat, did not bother to build defensive positions along the good tactical features; he followed his usual practice of clinging to the narrow native pads through the coastal belt of jungle. Nor did he pause in his headlong flight to build his well-known obstructions, or try to stem the rout of his forces. Only round his former barge points along the coast were defences found, and most of these were unmanned.

The Japanese rout was complete. Ribs of broken barges thrown upon the reefs or lying along the beaches are stark reminders of the efficient smashing of enemy sea communications by Allied air force and light naval patrols searching the hideouts along Vitiaz Strait weeks before.

### **The Advance Begins.**

Speed in movement was essential to bridge the gap between the two forces. The steep-sided Kwama River,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Sio Mission, was the first obstacle. Patrols were sent north and south along the banks of the river swollen from 40 to 400 yards wide to find a suitable crossing for transport. None was available. An improvised bridge was washed away by the raging torrent after the first platoon had crossed late in the afternoon of January 25, and the remainder of the troops had to swim, pulling their gear across with the aid of ropes. A patrol, pushed forward to cover the crossing, took prisoner an emaciated Jap. hiding in the marshy kunai near the river. He had had nothing but water for six days, and, for the previous ten days, had lived on berries until he became too weak to collect them.

Lack of heavy bridging equipment at the Kwama River, and the need for speedy movement, forced the Battalion to leave behind there all unit transport and heavy gear. From then onwards the troops carried all essential supplies. Beachheads supplied by barge from the sea were established along the coast close behind the leading troops.

From Kwama river to Crossingtown, which the 4th Battalion occupied six days after setting out from Sio Mission, the track





Huon Peninsula—In places the jungle came down to the sea; in others the coast lands were open spaces.

through the narrow coastal fringe was frequently intersected by swift streams coursing down from the mountains a few miles inland. Troops either had to swim the rivers or wade waist-deep across the sandbars.

Japanese opposition up to this stage was extremely light, being confined to short skirmishes with small bands of sick enemy who, abandoned by their fast-fleeing comrades, decided to fight rather than to risk death from disease and starvation. The coastal track was littered here and there with bones and decomposing bodies of Japs. who had been too weak to maintain their flight.

The Jap. withdrawal from Wasu, where they had maintained a barge point, was hasty for there and along the track to Singor the Australians found heavy and light automatic weapons, 80 rounds of 75 mm ammunition, and nautical gear. A barge beached at Wasu, after being strafed some time previously by American P.T. boats, had mounted on its stern an Australian 1941 manufacture 2-pounder tank-attack gun from which only the sights had been removed.

### **Supply Difficulties.**

Heavy rains and severe electrical disturbances with high winds since the advance began had continuously whipped the sea, and caused serious difficulties in supplying the troops by sea.

The monsoon continued with unabated severity for the last week in January, seriously disorganising barge schedules. Few of the flat-bottomed open deck craft had been able to withstand the terrific pounding of the seas, and barge traffic eventually had to be suspended, to be replaced by "biscuit bombing."

The force of the monsoon abated after the first week in February, and the sea lines were not so difficult to negotiate, but heavy rains continued to fall over the whole area, turning the coastal track into a quagmire. Opposition encountered by 30th Battalion after it left Crossingtown on February 4 was light. The main body of retreating Japs. was more than 20 miles forward, taking the overland trail from Gali to try and escape the Sidor block.

Although no organised resistance had yet been met, the physical endurance of the troops was severely tried. Weighted down under heavy packs they had to drag their weary way through miles of track mostly two feet deep in squelchy, stinking mud. Progress was sometimes reduced to a mile in 1½ hours. Signallers laying telephonic communications often sank up to their shoulders in the bogs under the weight of their equipment and the 40-lb. drums of signal wire, and had to be pulled out with ropes.

Resistance from the retreating Japanese stiffened near Gali 2. The Japs. had been using this area with its sheltered anchorage as a barge point and supply base, but the small rearguard left by the Japs. to cover their retreat into the hills was cleared out. Australian casualties were two wounded.

Aerial bombing and shelling by the 25-pounders had reduced the effectiveness of the dug-in positions at Weber Point, and the



Australians linked up with American troops at Saidor.

attackers mopped up without difficulty, capturing a fair amount of ammunition, guns and medical supplies. The staging area here was a shambles. Bodies in all stages of decomposition lay around and inside the broken-down native huts—ghastly evidence of the deadly diseases and starvation from which the Japs. had been suffering since their able-bodied troops had been withdrawn.

Early on February 10 an Australian section on reconnaissance along the track joined up with the Americans working east from Saidor.

This linking up effectively blocked any chance of the Japs. escaping by the coastal route. They were now forced into the forbidding razor-backs and steep valleys of the jungle-clad Finis-terres.

The 8th Brigade had covered the 97 track miles from Sio Mission in 16½ days, including three days' delay on account of bad weather. Official count of the casualties since the coastal advance commenced on January 25 was 109 Japanese killed and 6 taken

prisoner by the Australians and 123 killed and 7 captured by the Papuan Infantry Battalion. Several thousand Japanese skeletons and corpses in various stages of decomposition were discovered in native villages and lying alongside the tracks.

Australian casualties were three killed and five wounded.

### **Advance Into The Finisterres.**

Two lines of withdrawal were taken by the Japs. to reach the fastness of the Finisterre Ranges. Principal route was a well-defined trail over steep gradients from Gali 2 inland through Ruange, Bwama, Tapen, Wandiluk, Cual to Nokopo, thence over tortuous tracks around Saidor to the Mot River and Iris Point, about 13 miles west of the American forces holding Saidor. The second route was out of Malalamai, about eight miles west of Gali 2, to Kufuku and Gabutamon. The track then followed a precipitous course, joining the main line of withdrawal at Tapen. A two-pronged thrust along the Gali 2—Ruange and Malalamai—Gabutamon tracks was planned. The 35th Battalion, which had been training at Kelanoa, was brought forward to Gali 2 on February 13. Up till this time, the Japanese had not interfered with the daily reconnaissance and strafing of their escape lines by Australian-manned planes of 4 Air Co-operation Squadron based at Nadzab, nor had they attempted to bomb the Australian ground forces. On February 14 a lone bomber dropped four bombs harmlessly in the headquarters area.

A daily service by ducks from Weber Point kept supplies up to the Malalamai force, and a jeep track from Weber Point facilitated deliveries to Gali 2. For the inland drive, however, a system of native carrier trains had to be organised for supplies and evacuation of casualties. More than 400 natives worked on a shuttle service between the coastal supply points and villages as they were occupied, but with even this large number of carriers, the country was so difficult that the commanders could maintain no more than one company forward at a time.

While the relief of the battalions was taking place, Papuan infantry patrols were reconnoitring the Gali 2—Ruange track. Their information and that gathered from bush kanakas revealed that fair concentrations of the enemy would be found around Tapen and Wandiluk. A high-ranking Jap. officer was reported to have been carried along the track on a stretcher.

For hours the Australians toiled up the muddy track that wound out of the narrow kunai-covered coastal belt up the 2000 ft. rise. The troops slipped and slithered along the track which ascended, at times, at an angle of 60 degrees, and had to haul one another through the knee-deep mud. To cover their first stage, the troops climbed 800 feet up a stiff kunai slope for an advance of only 300 yards.

They were forced to rest every few yards, often beside the decomposed bodies and bones of Japs. who had failed to make the gradient.

The fortitude and cheerfulness under difficulties which characterises the Australian soldier in action were fully demonstrated during that gruelling climb. Among the signallers, the cable-laying section struggled upwards with their 40-lb. drums in addition to their normal equipment.

One signaller carried at least 100 lb. along this route, deeply-rutted and insecure from the passage of so many tramping feet before the signallers went through.

Ruange village—a group of about 15 native huts—sits astride a razorback and, although the rainfall there is 100 inches a year, there are no catchments. To replenish their water supply, the Australians had to slide for 10 minutes down an 800 ft. slope to a spring below the ransacked village. The journey back took 40 minutes.

### Starving Remnants.

Five Japs. were killed, one prisoner taken, and 60 bodies counted on the trail to Ruange. Scores more dead were seen on the track to Bwama, a few miles farther on toward Tapen.

An advance patrol of Australians and Papuan infantry struck their first determined resistance on February 16, when entering Bwama. The Japs. opened up with rifles and grenades. They were mown down by automatic fire, 27 being killed in the short engagement. A further five who tried to escape along the Tapen track were picked off by the scouting Papuan infantry.

Thirty-seven more decomposing bodies were counted during mopping-up next day.

These Japs. were physically better than those met on the coast. They had been able to ransack the native gardens for food. The route continued along the razor-back from Bwama, but on a slightly downward gradient, easing muscles strained in the initial climb up from the coast.

The village, 3000 ft. up in the Finisterres, surrounded by hundreds of native gardens, had been used by the Japs. as a staging post on the first leg of the 50 miles overland route.

A mid-day reconnaissance on February 18 revealed that more than 100 Japs. occupied Tapen village. The enemy was preparing his evening meal when the Australian attack was launched. Caught unawares, the Jap. was mopped up. In the centre of the village the Australians met fairly concentrated fire from rifles and grenades fired from huts, and a section was momentarily pinned down.

The engagement lasted only 50 minutes, and 52 Japanese were killed. Others fled into the gardens and were trapped by the waiting Papuan infantry, who killed another 51. An additional 40 unburied corpses were found in the gardens.

Few of the enemy in Tapen got away. Later that afternoon another 45 Japs., strolling nonchalantly back into the gardens, were surprised and killed by the native troops.

Total enemy casualties during the day's operations were 155 killed and 83 found dead. Only one Australian was wounded.

So sharp and unexpected was the attack on Tapen that the Japs. had no time to man an extensive defensive system of dugouts and earthworks they had skilfully sited in a commanding position at the top of the gorge and straddling the approaches to both Tapen and Wandiluk.

A patrol was sent out from Tapen to Moam over a rough track to join the Malalamai route at Gabutamon. Sixteen dead were counted en route, while, in the village, ten Japs. were killed and 16 more dead counted.

A patrol counted 16 more bodies on another track leading from Tapen.

### **Gruelling Country.**

Adopting similar tactics to those used at Tapen, the Australians on February 21, closed in on Wandiluk about 5 p.m. when the Jap. was eating his evening meal. Forty enemy were killed by the Australians and 10 by the Papuan infantry in a short engagement.

Patrolling outside Wandiluk village, the P.I.B. killed 20 more Japs. Farther on, at Wadabo, they accounted for 37.

Sgt. Bengari, a native N.C.O., who has more than 100 Japs. to his credit in fighting round Salamaua and along the Huon coast, was wounded when helping to clear this village.

The country beyond Wandiluk was so rugged and exhausting that the Australians were halted there. The natives travelled only a short distance beyond Wandiluk on the way to Nokopo, which the Japs were then reported to be evacuating, and counted 74 dead before they, too, were withdrawn.

Japanese casualties in the 15 miles inland route from Gali 2 to Wadabo were 340 killed and 350 found dead. Australians suffered three wounded—none seriously.

### **In From Malalamai.**

Concurrently with the main thrust from Gali 2 to Wandiluk, "A" Company of the 35th Battalion and a Papuan Infantry platoon had been vigorously cleaning up along the Japs.' trail of death from Malalamai to Gabutamon and beyond toward Tapen.

Supplies were brought forward eight miles from Weber Point by ducks, and a carrier train of more than 100 natives kept them moving up along the track to the troops. Because of precipitous country only one platoon could be maintained forward at a time.

On one patrol to Wotan, the P.I.B. killed 9 Japs.

The main attack was made down the Malalamai-Gabutamon track. The Australians with a section of P.I.B. as scouts, reached Kufuku (also known as Kosit) village, where they killed six and found 30 dead after a short engagement. Pressing on to Gabutamon they killed two more Japs. and counted another 110 dead en route.

As the patrols approached Gabutamon on the third day out—February 18—the going became increasingly difficult. Nine Japs. were killed on the outskirts of Gabutamon, and surprise tactics resulted in the rout of the Japanese occupants. The count revealed that 40 Japs. were killed in the fight, and 43 more bodies of Japs., who had died of sickness, were found lying in and round the huts.

A patrol, sent out from Gabutamon to investigate the track to Tapen, often had to crawl on hands and knees along the muddy, slippery tracks winding along the ridges, the forward man digging finger and toe holds and the others tied together with ropes to prevent them falling headlong down the slopes. One stretch of 800 yds., where they sank up to their shoulders in the stinking mud, the patrol took eight hours to cover. In another sector they had to cling precariously to vines and roots growing near the track to prevent themselves sliding over the cliff. Swathes of muddy kunai indicated where weak Japs. had missed their footing and slithered to their death hundreds of feet below.

### Death Piles.

Almost exhausted, the Australians were glad to reach the bottom of a 100-ft. chasm. The track wound a short distance along the chasm, and then went up the almost perpendicular slope. Ropes swaying from the top of the cliff had been left behind by the Japs.

Lying smashed and decomposing in a huge heap underneath the ropes were the bodies of 80 Japs. Weakened by privations, they had not the strength to haul themselves out of the chasm. After climbing part of the way, they had lost their hold on the ropes and crashed back on their companions below. Others, too weak even to attempt the climb, had apparently laid down among their countrymen and died from starvation and exhaustion.

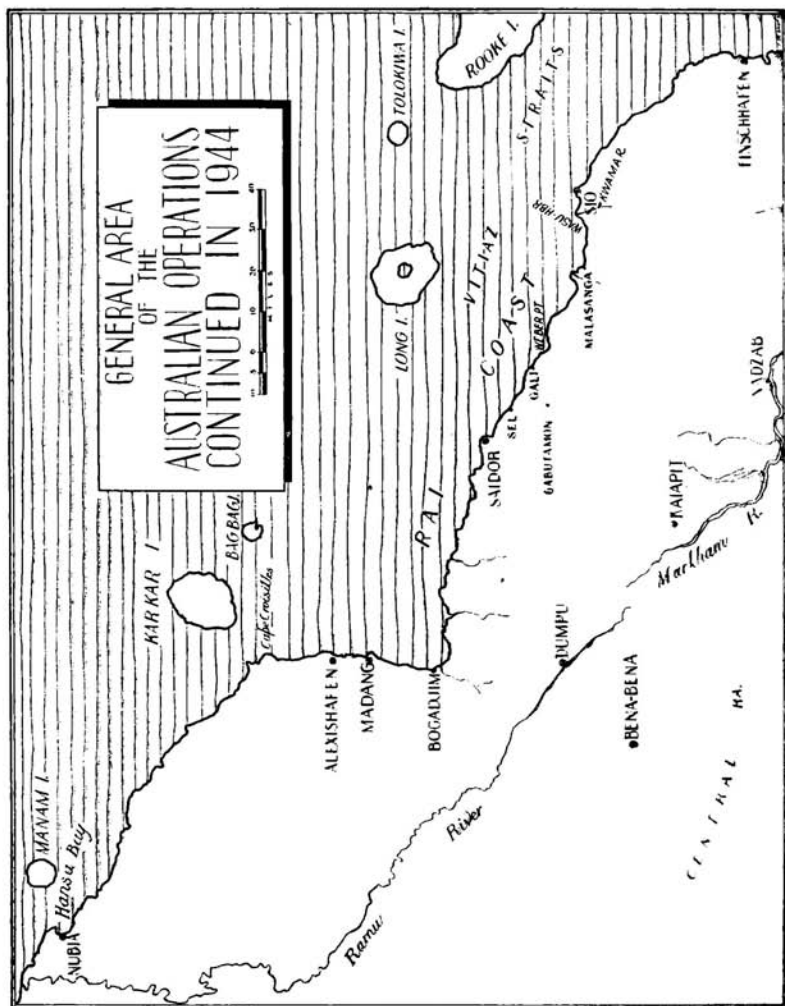
Americans from Saidor and Australians patrolling out from Gabutamon on another route in search of a lost Piper Cub reconnaissance plane, discovered another 82 Jap. bodies in a small jungle clearing on the downward slope of a particularly stiff ridge. The strain of climbing the ridge obviously overtaxed their strength and, fatalistically, they collapsed together and died in the clearing.

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Thus ended the campaign to free the Rai coast of the Japanese. In the Malalamai-Gabutamon section the Australians officially killed 80 and found 263 dead.

From the start of the mountain campaign on February 15 until its completion on February 26, the Australians and Papuan Infantry accounted for 420 Japs. killed and 613 found dead.







“**J**ungle navigation” was a term born of the Australian campaign which pushed the Jap. from his mountain strongholds back to Salamaua. It was coined by 15th Australian Infantry Brigade, which applied its science with full effect to bustle the Japs. back over the Finisterre mountains to Bogadjim and along the coast to Madang. The implications of the term describe precisely the nature of the task set the Australians.

It was land navigation in a sea of green jungle, rather than open fighting, which won back the country from the Japs.—land navigation in which bushmanship and sweat-stained maps took the place of sextant and detailed charts. From the rugged Finisterre mountains the Australians moved in small parties through the doldrum like heat of the kunai grass and up the slopes of storm-swept peaks, undergoing all the rigours of the Cape Horn mariner but with the added danger of death from the weapons of a human enemy.

The actual occupation of Bogadjim and Madang was peaceful, but that was made possible only by the months of interlacing patrolling to manoeuvre Jap. remnants from hundreds of square miles of country.

It is difficult to pinpoint the dividing line between the end of the Ramu Valley fighting and the beginning of the drive to the coast at Astrolabe Bay. The battles for Shaggy Ridge and Kankiryo, plus subsequent local operations, were actually part of a plan for the long-range defence of Gusap air strip. The Australian Command ordered patrolling in those areas as part of the plan, but, as the patrols probed further afield, so speculative eyes were turned toward Bogadjim. Thus the campaign was developed. It was from the Finisterres that the pressure was brought to bear on the Japanese coastal bases.

## Japs. Lose Interest.

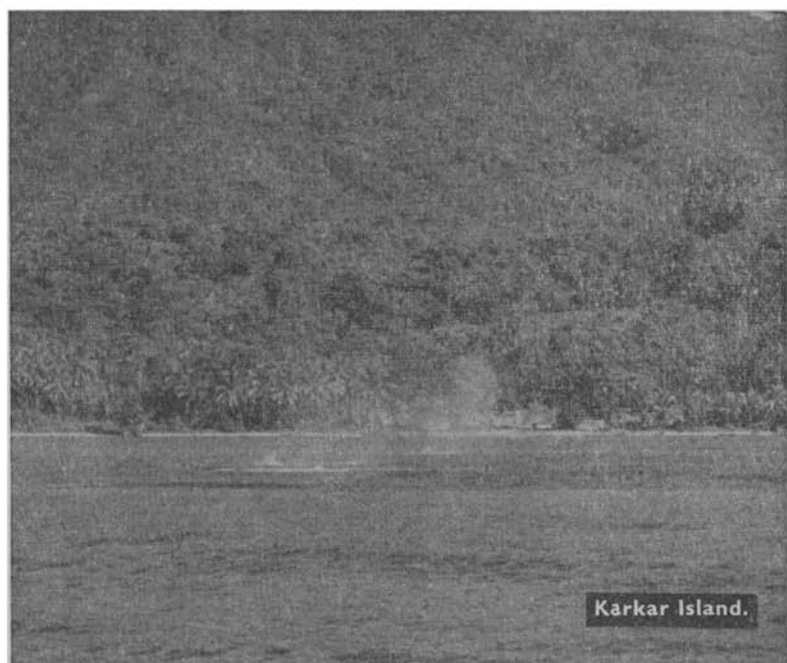
The 21st Australian Infantry Brigade made the initial attacks in the Finisterres in late 1943. Their role was taken over by 18th Australian Infantry Brigade in January, 1944. The 15th Australian Infantry Brigade (Brig. H. H. Hamrer) after fighting a supporting action in the upper reaches of the Ramu Valley, relieved the 18th Brigade on Kankiryo Saddle between February 9 and 21. It was this brigade, with the 2/2nd and 2/6th commandos, which navigated the jungle with such thoroughness that Bogadjim and Madang became untenable to the Japs.

By March 1, long range patrols had brought in information which indicated that the Jap., still wound-licking from the earlier Finisterre defeats, was in anything but an offensive mood. He was discovered in the Saipa 2 area, but his activity there was confined to defensive patrolling forward of his fixed defence lines. He was similarly lethargic along the Mindjim valley. Our patrols to the Kabenau River on the right flank reported no sign of Jap. movement at all.

Accordingly, the brigade commander ordered a series of patrols to discover the enemy's dispositions and intentions and to obtain topographical information. The 58/59th Battalion was to patrol to the coast along the Kabenau River, the 57/60th Battalion was to patrol along the Mindjim Valley with a view to driving the Jap. from the Saipa 2 area, and the 24th Battalion was to assist in the line of communication to Kankiryo Saddle by improving tracks and building signal lines.

To traverse in words a maze of places which are nothing more than names on the map would be tedious. It is sufficient to describe the manner of approach to Bogadjim. Our patrols worked in a rough semi-circle with Bogadjim as the point from which the arc was swung. No section of country was left unprobed, whether valley or mountain crag, creek bed or razor-back. Inexorably the radius of the semi-circle shortened. In the foetid gloom of the jungle the Australians nosed out Jap. strongposts and set ambushes for Jap. patrols. They were ambushed and attacked in return, but at no stage was there a large-scale battle. Skirmishes and bitter, brief encounters there were, but these were more in the nature of clashes between small nomadic bands stalking each other for days on end.

The advance of the 57/60th Battalion through the Mindjim river area embodied unique military circumstances. Supply of forward troops had been a terrific problem in all New Guinea campaigns, but here it assumed new proportions. The battalion had a line of communication of 50 miles, or the equivalent of six days "marching." All food, ammunition and weapons had to be manhandled over the whole distance. At times cooks and clerks had to take their places in the "white boong" lines, relaying stores on their backs. At one stage the patrols were 75 miles ahead of brigade headquarters. Another feat was performed by signals, who laid cables through incredible country to maintain telephone communication between forward elements and headquarters.



Karkar Island.



Madang.

## Strategic Road-Work Wasted.

The Japanese inland motor road from Bogadjim, used to supply outlying defence posts, ran through the narrowing Australian semicircle and came within the sector of advance of the 57/60th Battalion, but by this time it had become apparent that the Jap. realised he had been outmanoeuvred. Thus the road, about 28 miles in length, lost much of its earlier importance, although Jap. defence pockets still covered it and were to offer stubborn resistance.

To the west the 2/2nd Commandos were operating. From the middle of 1943 until April, 1944, they were in constant contact, pushing patrols into Jap. country still not entered by other troops. They lived alone and they fought alone, their bases sometimes as much as 40 miles inside the region occupied by the enemy. When the thrust toward the coast from Kankiryo saddle started, theirs was the job of clearing pockets west of the mountains. In March they sent out the largest fighting patrol ever. Its strength was approximately 70 Australians and 70 natives.

In the 57/60th Battalion's sector, the Jap. hold of the road was whittled down systematically in accordance with the general plan of advance in all areas. In the advance from Daumoina 37 three-ton trucks, a sedan car and a quantity of guns and ammunition abandoned by the retreating Japs fell into our hands.

One platoon, operating in the hills where the Japanese headquarters were located, was surrounded by night, fought its way out and a few days later went back and occupied Yaula Hill, the last of the high eminences overlooking the sea. There the Japs. had abandoned their mountain gun and had retreated to an ambush position at Bridge 6, the elimination of which was the last action before the occupation of Bogadjim. From here, badly wounded men had to be carried on stretchers by natives for a straight carry of 10 hours.

Valuable support to the 57/60th Battalion at the Bogadjim end of the motor road was given by Australia's oldest fighting unit—No. 2 Australian Mountain Gun Battery. This unit fought in the Sudan war, the Boer war and the Great War, and made its debut in this at Sattelberg. Its fire and the intensive patrolling of 57/60th Battalion forced the Jap. to retreat from what could have been a thorny point in the defence of the road.

Although the capture of Bogadjim had never been set out as part of the Australian plan at this time, it had become the point toward which all patrols in the area were working. The 58/59th Battalion, patrolling along and out from the Kabenau, was tightening the semicircle from the east under the same difficulties of terrain and supply as the 57/60th Battalion.

On April 12 a patrol along the main road entered Bogadjim and found it deserted. Thus the unofficial objective had been occupied without a final battle, but only because of the thoroughness of the jungle navigation in weeks of exhausting patrolling.

By April 19 patrols had established that the area to the Nuru river was clear. All eyes sought a new focal point. Weeks earlier many of the troops had seen Madang from the heights of Shaggy Ridge. What had been a distant panorama now showed promise of being a halting place in the near future.

Patrols set out to follow the coastal track from Bogadjim to Madang, but difficulty was experienced in crossing the river Gogol, a deep, wide and swift-running stream infested with crocodiles and with wide mud flats on each bank. Finally, the aid of small U.S. craft was sought to land the patrol at Bili Bili, north of the river.

As the advance toward Madang continued, the 30th Battalion entered the picture, and elements of it advanced with the patrols from 57/60th Battalion. A small Jap. rearguard on the outskirts of Madang was quickly driven out and the town was occupied on the afternoon of April 24.

With the occupation the task of driving the enemy from the Mindjim valley and Bogadjim road was concluded. All threat to the Ramu Valley by those routes was removed. From March 12 till April 24, the 57/60th Battalion had cleared and occupied about 50 miles of enemy territory.

The successive occupation of Madang, Alexishafen and Hansa Bay, and the spreading out of patrols to the mouth of the Sepik River marked the end of the campaign which began on September 4, 1943.

# AUSTRALIAN ARMY'S WAR DIARY

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## MIDDLE EAST AND U.K.

- 15 Dec. '39 Advance party of Australians embark for the Middle East.
- 11 Jan. '40 First Australian convoy (6 Aust Div) sails for Middle East.
- 16 Jun. '40 First Australian units arrive in UNITED KINGDOM.
- 3 Jan. '41 Australian troops attack and penetrate BARDIA defences.
- 5 Jan. '41 BARDIA falls.
- 22 Jan. '41 TOBRUK falls.
- 30 Jan. '41 Australians enter DERNÄ.
- 6 Feb. '41 BENGHAZI surrenders to Australians.
- 21 Mar. '41 Australians capture GIARABUB.
- 24 Mar. '41 British and Australians commence withdrawal from area of EL AGHEILA.
- 10 Apr. '41 Last Australian rearguard reaches TOBRUK.
- 10 Apr. '41 First engagement of Australian and German forces on GREEK front.
- 14 Apr. '41 First major Axis attack on TOBRUK fails.
- 20 Apr. '41 British and Anzac forces in GREECE withdraw to THERMOPYLAE LINE.
- 24 Apr. '41 Evacuation of GREECE begins. Australians arrive in CRETE.
- 20 May '41 German paratroops land in CRETE.
- 31 May '41 British and Anzac forces evacuated from SPARKHIA.
- 8 Jun. '41 Australians cross SYRIAN FRONTIER. TYRE surrenders.
- 21 Jun. '41 Fall of DAMASCUS.
- 9 Jul. '41 DAMOUR taken after bloody fighting.
- 12 Jul. '41 Cease fire. French resistance ceases.
- 4 Feb. '42 Australians commence embarking for Australia at SUEZ.
- 10 Jul. '42 Ninth Australian Division goes into action at EL ALAMEIN.
- 23 Oct. '42 Ninth Australian Division launches first attack in the British thrust at EL ALAMEIN.
- 1 Feb. '43 Ninth Australian Division sails for AUSTRALIA at SUEZ.

## MALAYA.

- 18 Feb. '41 Units of the Eighth Australian Division arrive in MALAYA.
- 14 Jan. '42 Australian troops make first contact with Japanese forces in MALAYA.
- 15 Feb. '42 Fall of SINGAPORE.

## SOUTH WEST PACIFIC.

- 17 Dec. '41 Australian and Dutch forces occupy TIMOR.
- 23 Jan. '42 Japanese land at RABAUL.
- 18 Feb. '42 Australian troops arrive in JAVA.
- 19 Feb. '42 Australian troops resist Japanese landing in TIMOR.
- 27 Feb. '42 Japanese land in JAVA.
- 7 Mar. '42 Japanese land at LAE and SALAMAUA.
- 10 Mar. '42 Japanese land at FINSCHHAFEN.
- 21 Jul. '42 Japanese land at GONA.
- 23 Jul. '42 First contact between Australians and Japanese at AWALA.
- 10 Aug. '42 Australian troops withdraw from KOKODA.
- 25 Aug. '42 Australians oppose Japanese landing at MILNE BAY.  
After bitter fighting Japanese forces are withdrawn  
by sea on 5 Sep. having suffered their first decisive  
defeat on land.
- 28 Sep. '42 Australians re-take EORIBAIWA RIDGE in the first  
stage of the Owen Stanleys offensive.
- 2 Nov. '42 Australians re-capture KOKODA.
- 9 Nov. '42 Australians re-take GORARI.
- 11 Nov. '42 Australians capture OIVI.
- 13 Nov. '42 Australians capture WAIROPI.
- 9 Dec. '42 Australians occupy GONA.
- 19 Dec. '42 Australians and Americans capture CAPE ENDAIADERE.
- 2 Jan. '43 Australians and Americans recapture BUNA.
- 22 Jan. '43 Australians and Americans take SANANANDA.
- 30 Jan. '43 Australians defeat Japanese attack on WAU.
- 3 Feb. '43 Australians at WAU counter-attack and begin the drive  
to SALAMAUA.
- 16 Mar. '43 Japanese cleared from MUBO gardens. Area finally  
cleared 13 Jul.
- 21 Aug. '43 Australians capture KOMIATUM Ridge.
- 4 Sep. '43 Australians (9th Division) land at "RED BEACH" on  
shore of Huon Gulf and begin drives to Lae and  
Finschhafen.
- 5 Sep. '43 American paratroops, Australian paratroops artillery and  
Australian engineers and pioneers seize NADZAB.
- 7 Sep. '43 Aerial movement of 7th Division into MARKHAM  
VALLEY begins.
- 11 Sep. '43 Australians capture SALAMAUA.
- 16 Sep. '43 Australians take LAE.
- 2 Oct. '43 Australians take Finschhafen
- 4 Oct. '43 Australians capture DUMPU (Ramu Valley).
- 25 Nov. '43 Australians drive Japanese from SATELBERG HEIGHTS.
- 8 Dec. '43 Australians capture WAREO.
- 23 Jan. '44 Australians capture SHAGGY RIDGE.
- 10 Feb. '44 Australians and Americans link up east of SAIDOR.
- 13 Apr. '44 Australians take BOGADJIM.
- 24 Apr. '44 Australians take MADANG.
- 26 Apr. '44 Australians take ALEXISHAFEN.
- 14 Jun. '44 Australians occupy HANSA BAY.

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